**Chapter 1**

**The Auction**

It all begins with my bad luck starting to turn around. My name is Sarina Butler and I recently turned 25 years old. Three years ago, I graduated with a degree in Illustration/Graphic Design. Somewhat I became disappointed because I couldn’t find a job with my degree. I am currently an administrative assistant for an Investment Company called U-TRADE. One day out of the five work days, I have to help out with Customer Service, which requires me to answer a multi-phone line system. My boss, who is often nice at times, wants things done yesterday. There are days I absolutely hate my job when I answer nasty phone calls. I have a small apartment in New York City and my landlord is about to raise my rent next month. My boyfriend left me for an older rich woman, even though I never wanted a future with him. I have occasionally been seeing a doctor for anxiety attacks which he prescribed medication for. I only take it when needed. It makes me feel tired and I hate being that way. A friend of mine at work, her name is Lucy, once told me that I will find my true destiny one day. After all, she is happily married to a handsome Asian dentist who is much older than her for a year now.

The weekend is here and it is going to be a blazing hot day in the month of July. I wake up feeling refreshed and start to think about what I should make for my breakfast. I decide on vanilla flavored pancakes as I begin to brew the coffee in my new coffee maker. The newspaper arrives at my door and I happen to glance at the headline that reads: “Auction at The Plaza Hotel”. I put on my reading glasses as I read the article quickly.

“*That sounds very interesting*,” I thought.

While I am eating I text my friend, Lucy, about it. Grabbing my cell phone, I texted “*Morning Lucy, would you like to go to an auction today? I read in the paper it starts at 1p.m.”*

Within fifteen minutes Lucy responds back. *“Sure, I will be at your apartment at twelve and we will go in my car.”*

I finish my breakfast and wash the dishes. I am so anxious to see what items are going to be auctioned since, I have never ever been at one before. I figured it would be a good idea to dust and vacuum my apartment before brushing my teeth and washing my face. I take out my vacuum and power it on. Soon after I hurry in the shower.

“I will wear something new and comfortably cool. “ I whisper.

Within two hours I was ready and waiting for Lucy to arrive. I look out the window and see her parking her just washed shiny car, you can see some water dripping on it. I grab my light sweater from the closet, knowing that the air conditioner will be incredibly strong at the hotel. The doorbell rings and I patiently walk over to the door. Opening the door Lucy shouts “Hey there lady, you look pretty sharp. Are you wearing new knee length shorts? The color matches your green eyes.”

“I am. I got them on sale yesterday when I got out of work. And, that’s because my black hair makes my eyes brighter. Anyway, I am anxiously ready to go. All I need to do is find where I left my handbag and we can leave.”

Lucy looks around and points as she says, “Look there it is on the sofa, Sarina.”

“Well okay let’s go.”

We both head out as I lock the door behind me.

Entering her beautiful silver Lexus, we both put on our seatbelts. She turns on her CD player andthe music group *Bastille* is playing.

“Nice, I love this song!” I shout.

“Me too, I actually bought the CD last week.”

As I look out the window, the traffic is moving quickly for a hot and humid beach day in July.

In less than a half hour, we arrive at the hotel and Lucy decides to park around the back parking lot. Lucy says “I feel safer parking in the back than out near the street. Someone might not pay attention and hit my car.”

“I understand totally, Lucy. I got sideswiped at a restaurant last year.”

We both exit out of the car and walk to the main entrance. Upon entering the hotel lobby, there is a big white poster board that reads: “**Auction of Antiquities**” in black print with a big red arrow pointing towards the direction of the room.

“There it is, Sarina!” Lucy shouts.

Walking towards the room and entering, I whisper, “It sure looks like a place for rich people.”

“That’s okay, Sarina. We are here to check things out and maybe you and I can buy something really nice.”

I feel kind of nervous as we take our seats. The room is decorated with some bright paintings near the auction table. A few balloons are beside them as the customers start to arrive. A man yells out “Ladies and Gentlemen, there are refreshments along with pastries being prepared at the table near the back wall. So please help yourself before the auction begins!”

The pastries look delicious as I whisper, “Sounds good to me Lucy, I am grabbing a pastry with coffee.”

“Oh yes, Sarina.”

Both of us walk over to the refreshment table deciding to stand a little bit while eating and sipping our coffee. As the room begins to fill with so many customers, we head back to our seats.

It is five minutes to 1 p.m. and the same man announces that the auction is about to begin. When I place my handbag between my feet, someone steps on my right foot. I look beside me and it is a very handsome man. He has light brown wavy hair and big blue eyes. My heart starts to beat very fast. He says, “I am sorry, honey.” In this perfect English accent.

I answer back, “I’m fine. No worries.”

I slowly turn my head to see if he is with anyone. He seems to be alone. I glance at his left hand and there is no sign of a wedding ring.

It is finally 1pm and the auctioneer announces the upcoming categories to be auctioned. He lists them in order and says “1. First there will be five decorative paintings that you see near my table in front of you. 2. There will be one velvet king size quilt that has baby angels flying which is dated, 1960. 3. Three silver knife sets dated, 1929. 4. Four 24kt. gold Italian watches dated, 1949. 5. Four silver flasks that are undated. 6. Last of all will be three sterling silver music boxes dated 1909. Please just raise your numbered handouts when a price is announced. All items will be auctioned separately. If more than one of you are interested, then, start your bidding by raising your numbered handouts.”

Lucy says, “I really don’t need any paintings.”

“I know Lucy, I don’t have any space for any paintings. We can watch and listen to see how an auction works.”

The paintings are very colorful and each has a white tag attached to the bottom right side. The first painting’s price is announced and the bidding begins when more than one person is interested. The price starts at $200 and it is sold to a lady for $275 after no more bidding was done. Then the second painting’s price starts at $225 and the bidding goes on. Again, with the next painting and until the last one is announced. The last one starts at $250 and the incredibly handsome man that sits next to me also bids on it. It is sold to him for $350. It is a painting of a ship, but I just can’t see the ship clearly from where I am sitting.

I turn to him and say, “It kind of looks like the Titanic.”

He answers “That it is, I just had to purchase it. By the way, my name is Eric.”

“I am Sarina.” We shake hands.

Eric smiles at me and says, “Nice to meet you Sarina.”

Lucy hits me gently on my arm and smiles. The second category which is the velvet blanket with baby angels flying, the price starts at $650. Only three people are interested and the bidding begins. It is sold for $750 to a cute couple. They are dressed very sharp and look like they have money. The next item is the three silver knife sets. Each one is auctioned separately. Five or more people are interested and they are all sold to the highest bidder.

Next comes the 24kt. gold watches and there are two for women and two for men. Again, each one is auctioned separately. Lucy says, “I think I would like to have one of the women’s watches.” The price starts at $900 and it is sold to Lucy for $1000.

I whisper, “Good for you, you can afford it.”

Lucy whispers back “It’s because I have been saving for a vacation that never happened. My husband has asked me to wait till next year. He will find out when I get home tonight.”

Another wealthy looking couple bought the other woman's 24kt. gold watch. Then the men’s 24kt. gold watches were each sold for $1100.

The next category is the silver flasks. The price on the first one starts at $300. The bidding begins. Eric bids on it and it is sold to him for $350. The other flasks were each sold to the highest bidder. After the flasks, there is an intermission for thirty minutes for anyone who wants to use the restroom or to grab some refreshments. Lucy and I headed for the ladies room.

In the ladies room Lucy whispers, “This is exciting to finally be at an auction”

“I know, Lucy. I hope I can afford to buy something today.” We exit out and head back to our seats.

Last of all came what I was waiting for, hopefully to purchase one of the music boxes as a collectible. As the auctioneer holds it up it is about 6 inches long and 4 inches in height. You can see a beautiful design engraved in the silver as he waves the music box around for all to see.

The price starts at $400 and a woman begins to bid on it and shouts $425!” I shout “450!”

The room was quiet after no more bidding and I was so excited that I got to purchase something. Lucy says “Good job. Aren’t you glad you came?”

“I am because my eyes couldn’t stop looking at it. You might think I am crazy, but it seemed to call out to me.”

The bidding begins on the next music box and more than four people are interested. Eric bids on it also and it is quickly sold to him for $475.

I whisper, “Okay Eric.”

One more music box left and one by one people begin to start their bidding. It is sold to a creepy looking man wearing a gray pinstripe suit for $500; he looks like a Twenty-First-Century gangster.

Lucy whispers in my ear “That man looks creepy.”

I whisper back in her ear “You took the words right out of my mouth.”

I turn to Eric and say, “You made out really well today, by purchasing three items.”

“Thanks. Let me give you my business card. I own a shop in town with my dad, who also restores antiques. I sure would like to see you again.” He reaches into his wallet and hands me his business card. His name is Eric James.

I place it inside a pocket within my handbag.

As soon as the auction was over, some of the customers that didn’t purchase a thing start entering the bar in the hotel. The ones that did purchase along with Lucy and I, walk to pay and get our merchandise. When the music box is handed to me it is beautiful like something out of this world. What is weird is the engraving of the wings. It looks like wings from a fairy. On one side is a key to activate the winding lever to start the music tone. As I open the lid, inside there is a lining made of soft blue velvet. And, there is a beautiful figurine wearing a blue sequined skirt and a black shirt with the same design of wings upon her shoulders. I look closely at her and she is holding a small round pink crystal in her right hand. I close the lid and hold on to the music box very tightly.

Eric is behind me and says, “It was a pleasure meeting you, Sarina. Please stop by my shop.” He shakes my hand.

“I will.” I happily smile at him and watch him leave.

Lucy and I start to leave the hotel as she says, “Do you feel like having a late lunch?”

“All right, the only thing is I have to use my credit card.”

We walk to the parking lot and enter her car as we put on our seatbelts. The car is so hot and Lucy quickly turns on the air conditioner. She begins to drive and says, “I think you met a fine gentleman today.”

“I think so too, just hope he doesn’t have a girlfriend or two roaming around.”

Lucy continues her drive down two blocks when she notices an Italian pizza shop and stops to park her car in front of the entrance. We get out of the car and she automatically puts her alarm on. She whispers, “We don’t want anyone breaking into my car stealing our stuff as we eat.”

“I know Lucy we both will be furiously angry.”

Once inside the pizza shop a lady at the front desk takes us to be seated. She gives us our menus. Lucy looks at the menu first and says, “How about we split a large square cheese pizza?”

“You got it, Lucy.”

The waitress arrives and Lucy begins to order the pizza along with a beer. I decided to order a glass of pinot noir red wine. We start to talk about how exciting it was at the auction, when I notice a man walking towards our table. It’s the gangster looking man from the auction who purchased the other music box.

He says “Hello ladies. I couldn’t help noticing when I walked in that you two were at the auction today. My name is Anthony Farino, but you can call me Tony. One of you young ladies bought that beautiful music box as I also did. I was wondering if I can talk you into selling the one you have for a price.”

“Sorry, but the answer is NO!” I shout.

He says politely, “Okay Miss, but, if you happen to change your mind I will be staying at the hotel for two days and you can ask for me at the lobby.” He walks slowly back to his table.

Lucy takes a sip of her beer and then says, “I wonder why he wants another music box, Sarina.”

“I don’t know and I do not trust him. His name sounds familiar. I think I read about him in the newspaper about a month ago. The FBI thinks he has something to do with a robbery at an art museum in New York. It stated that there was not enough proof to connect him with the crime.”

“Well, don’t worry about that guy, Sarina.”

The pizza finally arrives along with a free bowl of garden salad for two. We each take a crispy slice and begin to eat as Lucy says, “Wow, this pizza is really good.”

“For sure, Lucy.” As I crunch.

Forty-five minutes later we finished eating and drinking. We both split the bill and left the tip. As we head out I look to see if Tony is still at his table. He is still there eating and drinking while looking at his cell phone.

Before entering her car, Lucy de-activates her alarm. We enter and put on our seatbelts as she patiently drives me back home while we listen to her CD as she sings along. Lucy parks in front of my apartment building and says “It was a super exciting day today. See you Monday at work.”

“Thanks Lucy. See you then.” I shut the door and wave bye.

Once inside my apartment I place the music box on my single row bookshelf, which is attached to the wall in my living room. It sits next to a few books. I go into my bedroom as I leave my handbag and sweater on my bed. I go back to the living room while I turn the television on. I decided to rest on the sofa to watch a movie. Suddenly, from the corner of my eye I thought I saw a glowing pink light coming from the music box. Turning my head towards it, I must have been hallucinating.

After an hour, the movie is over and I shut the television off. I get up to go into the kitchen as I am hungry and take some chicken tenders out of the freezer for dinner tonight. I know they will be defrosted and ready to cook around 7:00 p.m. Grabbing the paper, there is an article about Anthony Farino again. It states that the FBI also assumes he is into illegal activity overseas.

“*I damn believe it*.” I whisper to myself.

Time goes by as I finish reading the paper and the chicken is ready to be fried with some grated cheese and bread crumb topping. I start to think about Eric and how incredibly handsome he is while cooking.

Fifteen minutes later it is time to eat. Turning the television on, there is breaking news about a shooting and killing that happened. I sometimes wonder if there is a place to live without any stinking crime.

Sunday morning is here and I slept soundly. I didn’t even need to take any medicine. I figured I won’t be needing it anymore. Putting on my bathrobe and slippers I went into the living room to look at my music box. It seems shinier for some reason just sitting there on the bookshelf. The Sunday paper arrives at my door and I grab it to read once my breakfast is made.

As soon as I am done eating a cereal breakfast my landline phone rings. I get up to go answer it and say “Hello”.

It’s my mother and she says, “Hello, and how is my daughter this morning?”

“I am fine. I had an interesting day yesterday. I went to an auction with Lucy at a hotel in the city. It was very exciting and I even bought a sterling silver music box. The auctioneer said it is from 1909.”

“I hope you didn’t spend too much money, Sarina!” My mother shouts.

“Well ma it is my money to spend, even though I do save money every two weeks towards my savings account.”

“That’s good, Sarina. Anyway, what are you doing today?”

“I am going grocery shopping. If you would like to go with me, try to be here before noon.”

“No problem. I will be there.” She hangs up as I do the same.

There are times when I know my mother gets lonely. After all, she left my dad a few years ago. He was always drinking so much. And, my brother is in his 4th year of college studying electronics.

Turning the television on to check for the Sunday weather, I see the glowing pink light coming from the music box again. I go over to open the lid and there doesn’t seem to be any light. I’m confused and kind of scared as I close the lid.

“It’s time for an eye appointment.” I whisper.

The weather is going to be sunny and hot again today. I shut the television off, go to the bathroom to brush my teeth and take a quick shower.

“*My mother should take her car. She will start to complain very quickly*.” I thought.

After my shower, I get dressed within minutes knowing that my mother will be here early. It’s almost 11:30 a.m. and I go look out the window. She is parking her car behind mine. As she gets out of the car I yell out the window “Excellent job parking!” She parked the front passenger side of the car on the curb.

She yells back “Okay smarty pants!”

Waiting at the door for her to come in I can smell her floral perfume. It smells like she is wearing a bouquet of roses. She enters as I shut the door behind her.

She looks around and says, “You do a good job keeping your apartment clean, Sarina.”

“Thanks ma, now relax on the sofa for a few minutes or take a look at my music box. It’s on the bookshelf. I am just grabbing my sweater and handbag.”

She sees it from the sofa without walking over to it and says, “Looks beautiful and expensive.”

Walking out of my bedroom I whisper, “I won’t tell you how much I paid.”

“I don’t want to know anyway, Sarina.”

Putting on my worndown sandals I shout, “That’s good. If you need to use the bathroom then go now!”

“No thanks, I'm good. I know we are taking my car.”

We both exit out as I lock the door. I place my arm around hers and we carefully walk towards the car. She says, “Oh my goodness, Sarina, It feels like a scorcher today.”

“Yes it is. The news said it is going to be between 95-100 degrees and very humid. And, for everyone to keep hydrated.”

Entering her car, we put on our seatbelts. She starts the car up and the air conditioner comes on. She looks at me and says, “How the heck do you drive without any air conditioning in your car, Sarina?”

“Oh, you mean my piece of junk. Easy, with my windows down and I try not to breathe too heavy.” She laughs.

Within a half hour we arrived at the supermarket and it was packed with many cars.

I shout, “Quick ma, parking space near the front of the store. Use your handicap windshield plate!”

She pulls into the parking space and parks. We get out of the car and walk into the supermarket. Most customers seem to be shopping for barbeque items. While we get our carts I start thinking if I should mention to my mother about Eric. She hated my previous boyfriend. She always said he was nothing but a bum. I thought and thought, as we are filling our carts I whisper, “There is something I like to tell you. I met a handsome man at the auction yesterday.”

“I hope he has his own money, Sarina.” She rolls her eyes at me.

“He happens to own his own antique shop with his dad, who restores items downtown. He and his dad are originally from England.”

“Very nice, I do wish you all the luck in the world.”

“Thanks. He seems very mature and knowledgeable.”

We were almost finished shopping when I had an idea. As we approach the check-out area I whisper, “Would you like to drive by Eric’s shop without us going inside. I just want to see where the shop is located?”

“Fine Sarina. Just don’t let him see you. He might think you are stalking him.”

“Oh please, you worry about stupid things. Anyway, after we put our grocery bags in the trunk and the frozen items in your insulated bags, I am getting an ice-coffee next door. If you want one it’s on me.”

“Sure. I will take mine with cream only.”

On our way out you can feel the day getting humid. My mother begins to sweat as we place the bags in the trunk. I go over to get the ice-coffees while she waits in the car for a few minutes.

Once I get back to the car I place the ice-coffees in the cup holder. She turns on her GPS as I start to enter Eric’s shop address. She says, “Sarina, it looks like it’s only a few minutes away.”

“I know. Start driving and I will look out the window.” Starting her car up she begins to drive.

The GPS is stating that traffic is clear as we both take a sip of our coffee. Within 15 minutes I start to see a building that has a few items outside near the entrance of the door. I look up and see a sign that reads ***Fine Antiques*** in red print.

“Look there it is!” I shout.

“Okay, Sarina, please calm down. Let’s have the car behind me pass and I will park a few feet away from the entrance.”

My mother parks and I can see inside the store clearly without him noticing us. There are many customers looking around at items. I can see Eric at the register and he does look gorgeous. He is wearing a light blue short-sleeve shirt with khaki pants. His light brown wavy hair has a shine to it and it looks like his business must be doing well.

I kept staring for a while when my mother said, “You look like you want to go inside and talk to him.”

“No, not right now. I will next weekend. If you want we can leave since I know how to get here.”

She starts up the car and begins to drive me back home. When I turn the radio on, the newsman says the temperature is 99 degrees. I finish drinking my ice-coffee as we approach my apartment building.

My mother parks her car and says, “Just a reminder, Sarina, don’t tell Lucy that we happened to drive by Eric’s shop today. She might accidentally say something to him and he could take it the wrong way.”

“I know, don’t worry.”

Getting out of the car I grab my two grocery bags from the trunk. I give my mother a hug and kiss her on the cheek. She departs as I make my way into my apartment. Once inside I place my handbag and sweater on the sofa. I start to unload my groceries into the refrigerator and the rest inside my cabinets.

“Oh shit!” I shout. Knowing in my mind I forgot to buy a bottle of wine.

“I think I will go for a walk down the street. The sun will do my bones good.” I whisper.

I quickly grab my handbag along with my sunglasses and go out again. I sweat a little as I arrive at the liquor store. I happened to meet my next-door neighbor who just retired from a cell phone manufacturing company. He lost his wife to cancer 2 years ago. His name is Henry Watson and he has a daughter that is two years older than me who recently got married. He is happy to see me and says “Hi Sarina. How are you doing?”

“I’m doing just fine. I forgot to buy a bottle of red wine when I went grocery shopping today.”

“Oh, I’m looking for some beer to have with my barbeque for dinner tonight. I sure would like to have you join me. I have plenty of food so please no worries.”

“Of course, I will. Wait for me and we can walk back together.”

Exiting out from the liquor store we begin to walk back. Henry says, “It sure is hot again today but, I don’t mind the walk. I actually need to do more exercise.”

We arrive at the apartment building and I walk Henry to his front door as he says, “See you at 6:00 p.m., Sarina.”

“You got it. I will make a salad and throw in some veggies, like cucumbers, tomatoes and olives.”

“That sounds good, Sarina.”

Upon entering my apartment I lock the door. Placing the bottle of wine on the counter, I turn on the television for a while. I put my handbag on the coffee table and hopefully I will try to relax on the sofa till 5:30 p.m. At that time, I will make the salad. As I sit down, I begin to hear an unusual humming noise. It sounds like it’s coming from the music box. Nervously, I get up and walk towards it on the bookshelf. I pick it up and place it in my hand and open the lid again. Waiting for at least a minute I wanted to make certain I heard a humming noise. Only there was no sound.

“I just can’t figure out why I am seeing pink lights and now I hear a humming noise.” I whisper.

I close the lid and place it back on the bookshelf.

The time goes by and it is now 5:30 p.m. Shutting the television off, I go into the kitchen to prepare the salad. Grabbing the bag of chopped romaine from the refrigerator along with a cucumber and 2 tomatoes, I begin to carefully chop them into small pieces. I place everything into a large white bowl and top it off with some black olives. I hit the bathroom and I am ready to leave.

As I leave I hold the salad bowl carefully in one hand. My handbag is on my shoulder and salad dressings are in a plastic bag hanging over my wrist. Walking out I lock the door and head to Henry’s apartment only two doors down.

When I arrive at Henry’s you can sure smell his barbeque. It absolutely smells yummy. I ring the doorbell twice and he shouts, “Okay, just a minute!”

He opens his door and I shout, “Hello, long time no see!” He starts to laugh.

\*Henry locks his door and takes me to his decorated patio where the barbeque is. Music is playing softly from his stereo. He then places my salad in a small fridge that he has outside and my salad dressings on the table. He has a beautiful polished wooden square table with four chairs. Striped tan and white lawn pillows are on them. Paper plates, cups and utensils are on the table along with hamburger and sausage rolls. One beer is opened as he grills his hamburgers and sausages.

I take a seat as I watch him grill. He says “Why don’t you take out a beer from the fridge. There are two different kinds that I bought today.”

“Okay.” I open the fridge and grab a Coors light beer.

Henry seems very happy that I came. He says, “How is everything going for you, Sarina?

“Good, I went to my first auction yesterday with a friend from work. I bought a beautiful sterling silver music box.”

Henry smiles and says, “ I also go to auctions with some of my buddies.”

“I had to have it, Henry, as a collectible. There were three of them and one was bought by a gorgeous man that was sitting next to me.”

“Wonderful, did you happen to talk to him?”

“Yes. He gave me his business card to come visit him at his antique shop.”

Henry winks at me and says, “That’s fabulous.”

The hamburgers and sausages are ready as Henry places them in an aluminum tray. He says, “I am also grilling some rolls for us.”

“That’s fine with me, Henry.”

As I prepare the paper plates and utensils for us, I decide to tell Henry about my strange experience with the music box.

“Henry, there is something I would like to tell you about what is on my mind. I just don’t want my mum knowing about it.”

“Sure, Sarina, what is it?”

“I’ve been seeing pink lights lately coming from the music box, and just this afternoon I heard a humming noise. The first time that it happened to me I was on my sofa watching a movie Saturday afternoon. Then, Sunday morning again when I was watching the news. Both times I saw the lights from the corner of my eyes, not directly staring at it. The humming noise happened when I was on the sofa before making the salad to come here. I think I am about to go insane, Henry.”

“You sure are not, Sarina. Just relax and let’s enjoy our dinner tonight.” Henry seems to understand what is happening and he becomes quiet.

The rolls are ready and placed in the aluminum tray with the food. We both grab a hamburger and sausage with the roll. I take out the salad from the fridge and place it on the table. Henry says, “I have corn that I will cook on the grill in about 25 minutes.”

“Yum…….I love barbecued corn, Henry.”

“Oh, Sarina, would you please go into the kitchen and on the table is the ketchup?”

“Of course.” I opened the slider door and there it was resting on the table. I grab it and make my way back to the patio, closing the slider door behind me.

I hear my stomach growl and can’t wait to try a hamburger. As I squeeze some ketchup on it I quickly take a bite.

Before Henry takes a bite he says, “I got the hamburgers at the butcher shop today. The sausages are from the supermarket.”

“Well Henry, I’m sure the sausages are good too.”

While we enjoy our meal Henry says, “How is your mother doing?”

“She is doing well. I went grocery shopping with her today.”

“She is a wonderful lady, Sarina. The next time you have her over, all three of us will have dinner at my apartment.”

“Sounds good!” I shout. I can tell by his look he likes my mum.

I take another sausage and Henry shouts, “Good and enjoy!” He then gets up to take the corn from the fridge and places it on the grill. As he sits down he also takes another sausage.

“How is your daughter doing now that she is married, Henry?”

“She’s doing really well. Her husband is a good man. Maybe someday, Sarina, you also can be married to a good man.”

“I hope so, Henry. Just not someone like my dad who relies on alcohol for family problems.”

The corn is grilling as we are almost finished eating. Henry’s landline phone rings as he gets up to go answer it in the kitchen. He says “Hello”.

He listens to the person on the other end and he says “Sarina is here and I made barbeque for us. I will talk to you soon. Love you.” He then hangs up.

He comes back to the patio and says, “That was my daughter and she would like to have me over for dinner next Sunday.”

“That’s awesome Henry. She cares about you and I am sure she doesn’t want you to be lonely at times.”

The corn is ready and Henry places it in another aluminum tray. He turns the volume of the stereo up a notch while I take corn.

“You like this music?” I whisper.

“Well, my daughter got me hooked on it.” He laughs.

As we crunch on our corn, I look at my watch and it’s almost 8:15 p.m. I turn to Henry and say, “I will help you clean up before I leave for the night.”

“Thanks. I do appreciate it, Sarina.”

Fifteen minutes go by and Henry gets up again to make sure the grill is off. A rock song came on.

“You like this song, Henry?”

“I do.”

I get up from my chair and in a funny way I say, “Would you care to dance, sir?”

He laughs and says, “Of course young lady only I dance really weird.”

“That’s okay. I dance weird too.” We both start to dance our weird way as we sing.

After the song is over we both grab another piece of corn as we take a breather.

Soon after Henry begins to scrub the grill and I start to clean up and place the trash in a green garbage bag. After 15 minutes Henry walks me to the front door as I give him a big hug. He kisses me on the cheek and says, “Remember next time, you and your mother for dinner.”

“Absolutely!” I shout. He locks his door and I walk back to my apartment.

Entering my apartment I lock the door. I put on the kitchen light first and turn my bedroom lamp light on. Placing my handbag on the bureau I put some money in my wallet for work tomorrow. I sure had a good time over Henry’s and I am feeling a little tired now. I decided to change into my comfy pajamas.

Soon after I brush my teeth I will watch my show that starts at 9:30 p.m.

I look at the kitchen clock and it is time for my show. Turning the television on to the channel I glance at the music box and lie down.

“ I hope nothing strange happens while I watch my show tonight.” I whisper.

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It is Monday morning and I wake up to the sound of country music from my alarm clock. I forgot to lower the volume as I covered my ears. Looking out my bedroom window the clouds are blocking the morning sun. I am sure it will be a bright sunny day. Putting on my bathrobe and slippers I go into the kitchen to prepare my breakfast before hitting the shower to go to work. Deciding to have a quick breakfast, cereal with milk, I start to brew the coffee.

Everything was ready in minutes as I began to eat and sip my coffee taking my vitamins. They give me extra energy at work.

As soon as I finished eating I hit the shower. I let my hair air dry as I put facial cream on and eyeliner on my eyelids. The minute I am done I walk back into the kitchen to look at the clock on the wall.

“Shit it’s time for me to leave.” I shout.

I grab my light sweater and handbag and out I go locking the door behind me. When I get in my car the car seat is hot as I roll the windows down. Beginning to start the car up my music comes on as I head onto the highway.

Within 25 minutes I arrived at my building. I head straight into the parking lot when I see Lucy getting out of her car. I beep once and wave as she waits for me to park. While getting out of my car Lucy shouts, “Morning lady!.”

“Good morning to you Lucy!” I shout.

“Wow, by the tone of your voice you seem happier, Sarina.”

“You know what? I am.” We both start to walk into the building taking the escalator to our department.

Once we arrive at our own desks, my boss is in his office with coffee in hand and shouts, “Morning ladies!”

Lucy and I both shout, “Morning!”

“Hope he doesn’t put me in Customer Service today.” I whisper to Lucy.

Lucy whispers, “Maybe not, it’s only Monday.”

Lucy is already checking her work load on her desk as she turns on her computer. And, I have paperwork on my desk to file for a Monday morning.

My boss walks out of his office and says “Sarina, can you send a thank you letter to these 5 clients. I will be going to a meeting and will be back late this afternoon. Also, no Customer Service today.”

I am so happy he said that as he began to leave. The minute he is out the door I look at Lucy with thumbs up.

Starting to type the letter and merging it with the 5 client addresses, I start thinking about Eric. I sure would like to know where he lives.

Time is going by quickly and lunch time will be here. I sent an email to Lucy and asked her if she would like to take lunch at 12:30 p.m. and go downstairs to the sandwich shop.

Sending the email back she says, “That’s fine with me. Only we can’t be late. The big mouth, Larry, that sits next to you might tell the boss.”

I reply back and say, ”Well, we can tell the boss that Larry was smoking pot in the mensroom.”

I look at Lucy and she starts to laugh quietly. Larry notices and wonders what’s up. My phone is suddenly ringing and I answer it as I take a message down on a memo pad.

The lunch hour finally approaches while I send the letters to print. I close my software application and grab my handbag. Walking over to Lucy’s desk she is also getting ready and we head to lunch. Taking the escalator down to the sandwich shop a line is beginning to form.

Lucy says, “I am having a Chicken Caesar wrap.”

“I guess I will have the same, Lucy.”

We order after the next customer in line and wait a few minutes while the man at the counter makes our sandwiches. Once we receive our sandwich we both grab a drink and pay the lady at the register.

I whisper “Hurry, let’s grab the table near the window.”

We sit down and place our handbags on an empty chair as we start to unwrap our sandwiches. I take a bite and shout, “This tastes so good!”

Lucy takes a bite of hers and says “Yeah, mine tastes awesome. Anyway, how do you like your music box, Sarina?”

I start thinking about my strange experience with the music box; only I will not tell Lucy.

I whisper to Lucy, “Awesome, I placed it on my bookshelf in the living room.”

“That’s good, Sarina. I love my watch only, I forgot to wear it today. By the way, are you going to see your new love, Eric, soon?”

“Now that you ask, Lucy, I am definitely planning to go to his shop this coming weekend. Why don’t you come with me? We can both check out his shop and I can check him out.” We start to laugh as we devour our lunch.

After we finish eating we clean up our trash and Lucy says, “Hey, we still have 20 minutes left. Let’s go across the way to the clothing store.”

“Fine with me Lucy, I actually bought my shorts that I wore at the auction there.”

We exit out of the sandwich shop and walk directly across the way to the clothing store. As we enter the Summer sale is still going on. Lucy walks over to the rack of shorts and picks out a black pair.

She looks excited and says, “These are only $7.99 and I am trying them on right this minute.”

“Okay, Lucy.”

I go over to the rack and pick out a gray pair of yoga shorts. I know they will fit because the material stretches. I wait for Lucy to exit out of the fitting room before I decide to purchase them. When she comes out she is holding the shorts in her hands and says, “They fit well and I am ready to go to the register.”

“Yah, me too. I am buying this pair.”

Walking over to the register, a young salesman was waiting for us and said, “With your purchase today ladies you get a 99-cent cloth tote. It comes in two colors: tan or light blue with a symbol of our logo “LM” for *La Moda* in black print at the center of the tote.”

“Awesome I will take the tan one!” I shout.

Lucy says, “I will take the light blue one.”

After the salesman rings us up he places the shorts in the 11 X 11 cloth tote. It has small rope style handles on it. We then hurried out to take the elevator back to our department in case Larry was watching the clock.

I walk quickly to my desk and I put my shorts and handbag in the desk draw. Lucy places hers on a chair beside her desk. She looks at Larry and gives him a big-eyed look and starts to do her work knowing that we were not late. I have some phone messages to take down on a memo pad for my boss and then I will do the filing in his office.

Working in his office, the afternoon seems to be flying by. I look out the window and it sure looks gorgeous out there. I am almost done with the filing and before I lock up the file cabinet I make sure the files are neat. Walking back to my desk I look at the time on my computer; it is already 4:30 p.m.

“A half hour to go.” I whisper.

Lucy walks over to my desk and whispers, “Looks like the boss is running late from his meeting. Just want to inform you that I saw Larry staring at you with googly eyes a few times.”

“Well, he can stare as long as he knows that I am not interested in him.” I whisper.

We both giggle as Lucy walks back to her desk. I suddenly decide to go to the ladies’ room before it gets full. I want to grab my things at 5:00 p.m. and be ready to go home.

Back from the ladies’ room I received two client emails. I decided to answer.

After I am done I look at the wall clock and it’s ten minutes to 5 p.m. I started to shut down my computer for the day. Making sure my phone is on voicemail, I grab my handbag and tote as I walk over to Lucy’s desk.

Lucy looks exhausted and whispers “I am staying about 15 minutes late because I have to finish payroll. We all want to be paid this week.”

“Okay, I will see you in the morning and have a good night.”

Heading out of the department and down the escalator, I walk out of the building. It sure is *humid* as I approach my car. I quickly roll my windows down as I enter. Starting up my car I turn the radio on to country music this time, as I slowly make my way towards the highway.

Traffic is moving a little slow with no accidents, except for an idiot that just cut me off. I arrive home parking my car in less than a half hour on a Monday afternoon. I roll up my windows and turn the car off as I grab my handbag and tote. I exit out and I can’t wait to change into a pair of shorts and t-shirt before I make my supper. Sweat is running down my back and it is very uncomfortable.

Entering my apartment, I go directly into my bedroom and place my handbag and tote on the bureau. “I think I will wear the new shorts now.” I whisper.

As I change I start to figure out what I shall make for supper. I then remembered there’s pork breasts in the fridge from Sunday morning that I was going to make for dinner, but didn’t, because I went to Henry’s for his barbeque.

As I am done changing I go into the living room to adjust the air conditioner to a medium setting. I looked over at my music box. My heart beats fast seeing that it has moved closer to the edge.

“Maybe I moved it there and can’t remember.” I whisper.

I open a bottle of wine that I bought yesterday before I begin to fry the pork breasts with rice. I turn on the television to watch the news. And again, there was breaking news about a shooting in town related to drugs.

“I am so tired of hearing the same old shit!” I shout.

When I finish frying I put the pork on a plate and place it on the table next to the bottle of wine. I then pour some wine in a glass and pick up my dinner plate as I take three pieces of pork with rice. Finally, I get to sit down in my comfy chair. The news is over as I switch channels to a game show while enjoying my dinner.

As I sip my wine it makes me feel completely relaxed.

Once I finish my dinner I sit for a short while and try to see who wins the game.

Within ten minutes the game show was over. I clean the table and wash the dishes. Suddenly, I heard that humming noise again, but very low since the water was running in the sink. I shut the water off and wait a little bit. The humming was still happening and I slowly started to walk towards the music box. I pick it up and open the lid.

My heart is beating fast, I am nervous and my hand is shaking. I notice the pink crystal in the figurine's hand is spinning. I stare and stare when I feel like I am about to faint, and, by mistake I close the lid on the music box.

In a few minutes I feel much better as I open it again. The pink crystal stopped spinning. There was no movement while the figurine was holding the crystal. I close the lid and place it back on the bookshelf.

“Okay that was weird!” I shout.

I must not be afraid of this peculiar phenomenon. It sure is weird but kind of exciting at the same time. I comfortably take a seat on the sofa to watch my shows for the rest of the night before bedtime.

All seems quiet as the night goes by. “The next time I have dinner with Henry I do have to tell him what has happened. “ I whisper.

**Chapter 2**

**The Phenomenon**

It’s Tuesday morning and I feel perfectly fine after last night as I get up to make my breakfast. I look out the window and the sun is beginning to rise beautifully. I feel like making toasted raisin bread this morning. I decided to brew some vanilla flavored coffee while watching the morning news. As I’m eating I start to think about that phenomenon that occurred last night. It definitely makes me feel a little exhausted just wondering what might happen next.

Finished my breakfast in minutes as I washed the dishes. Shutting the coffee maker off, I put the remainder of the coffee in a large cup.

“I’ll keep it for ice-coffee tonight.” I whisper.

Heading into the bathroom I brush my teeth and scrub my face with a cleanser made of olive oil. I’ll head into the shower as soon as I am done.

I was done with my shower and dressed within an hour. Letting my hair air dry with some leave-in hair oil, I put my eye makeup on and facial lotion.

Leaving a little bit early this morning I grabbed my handbag and sunglasses from my bedroom. “I need to have an ice coffee before I go to work.” I whisper.

When I approach the front door to leave I glance at the music box as I quickly exit out. I walk to my car and unlock it as I gently sit. Turning the key to start my car I roll down my windows. While on the highway I notice traffic is much lighter than usual, probably because some people are on vacation.

Turning the radio on I whisper, “I feel like listening to some rock music this morning.”

All of a sudden I thought I saw Anthony Farino drive by in a black Audi. I begin to wonder where he’s going today. I hope he didn’t see me as I took the next exit to enter the parking lot of my building. Finding a good parking space I roll the windows up leaving just a crack open before turning the car off. I exit out and lock my doors.

Walking to the building and entering the sandwich shop there weren't many customers. I pick out a huge coffee cake muffin and pour some ice-coffee in a cup with cream. I pay the lady at the register and whisper, “Have a nice day.”

She says, “You as well.”

Taking the escalator up to my department, my boss is in his office sipping his coffee as I say “Good morning.”

He then says “Morning Sarina.”

As I walk to my desk I place my handbag inside my desk drawer. My muffin and ice-coffee are on my desk. Taking my seat I turn the computer on. Sipping my coffee first, I then take a bite of my muffin.

“Holy shit this is so good.” I whisper.

Ten minutes pass by and my boss walks slowly out of his office and says “Sorry to disrupt your breakfast, Sarina. Would you like to design a cover for a brand new magazine. I do think you have the qualifications to make it work.”

I was so shocked that I almost spilled my coffee as I shouted, “You bet, I would love to!”

My boss seems content and politely says, “Very good and take your time because I will give you till Friday to show me three different designs. And, there will be no customer service phone work all week.”

He walks back into his office when there is a client waiting for him. I just can’t see who it is because his back is facing the office door.

I start thinking about some ideas when Lucy walks in and says, “Morning everyone.” She then walks to her desk and sits down while she places her bag on the chair beside her. She turns her computer on and also has a cup of coffee that she places on her desk.

Once I finished eating my muffin I replied to 4 client emails first. I will send out thank you letters to all. Larry walks in and whispers, “Morning Sarina.” He smiles and gives me a wink.

I whisper back “Morning.” As I look away quickly.

Grabbing some white paper to jot down some ideas I begin to outline the first draft. I go into my software application on my computer and start to create something when I receive an email. It’s from Lucy and it says, “How about lunch downstairs again they are having a special today?”

I reply back and say, “Sure, is 1 p.m. fine?”

She replies back and says, “Fine with me. See you then.”

I go back to my outline and I want to finish the first draft before I leave today. I can eventually design the other two covers on blank white paper at home. Lucy will probably wonder what I am so focused on at lunch.

The phone starts to ring and I answer it as my boss is with his client. Taking down a message I then decided to place my phone on voicemail till lunchtime.

Two hours pass by fast and I have to use the ladies room. As I get up from my chair I notice that my boss is still with the same client writing down lots of information. Walking by his office I look to see who it can be. My heart beats fast and I just couldn’t believe my eyes at who it is. It is Anthony Farino as I mouth the words “Son of a Bitch”.

“That must, of ,been him passing me on the highway.” I whisper.

I enter the restroom as I try to calm myself down while taking a few deep breaths.

Once I go back to my desk, I feel much calmer and start to think that maybe he already has some sort of account here. Only, that sure is strange because I met him on Saturday and he was interested in another music box.

I sent an email to Lucy saying “Guess who is here and in the boss’s office right now?”

Lucy replies back and says, “Who is it?”

I reply and say, “Anthony Farino, from the auction. I don’t think he noticed me at my desk. I will talk to you more at lunch.”

I look up at Lucy and she nods her head as if to say okay. I continue to design the first cover until we go to lunch.

A few more hours go by and my eyes slowly glance over to see if Farino was still in my boss’s office. He was not there.

Looking up at the wall clock it is now time to go to lunch. I received an email from Lucy and it says, “Are you ready to go to lunch now?”

I reply back and say, “Sure just give me 5 minutes to close my software App.”

I close the software application and grab my handbag as I walk over to Lucy’s desk. She was ready to go and we both were happy to take the escalator down to the sandwich shop.

By the time we enter there is a long line and I whisper, “I just can’t believe Farino was in the boss’s office this morning. I was so nervous when I saw him. I was going to the ladies room and I made sure he didn’t see me.”

Lucy whispers, “Now Sarina, please don’t have some sort of a panic attack completely over nothing.”

“I know. I was thinking earlier that he must have an account with the company and he probably came in to make some adjustments.”

“Good. Now let’s order our lunch, we’re up next. That special popcorn chicken with steak fries for $3.99 sounds good.”

“Yum, I think I will order that too, Lucy.”

Lucy orders her food first and I order after her.. Within a few minutes we receive our food placed on white trays. We both walk over to the soda area to get a drink. While we pay at the register I notice an empty table near a window and I shout, “Let’s walk fast to grab that table over there.”

We walk over to the table and it looks spotless clean.. We sit and place our trays down as our handbags go on one empty chair.

“Holy Moly, this looks good, Lucy!” I shout.

While I take a bite of the popcorn chicken and steak fry Lucy whispers, “I’ve been hungry all morning.”

“Yeah, me too.” I whisper as we both chow down the popcorn chicken.

I take a sip of my lemon water as I whisper, “As I was mentioning in the email this morning, I was busy trying to design a cover for the company’s new magazine. The boss would like me to do three different ones. He then will choose one of the three.”

“That’s great, Sarina. The new magazine does sound awesome!”

“For sure. It’s a super exciting project for me to do this week.”

I look up and notice Larry entering the sandwich shop and glances over at me and winks. I whisper, “Larry just walked in so let’s hurry with our lunch before he comes over to sit with us. I don’t want to be rude. He just annoys me at times.”

We finish before he walks to get a drink. We clean up our trash and quietly sneak out. Lucy says, “Hey, we still have time to go outside to the *seven-11 store* for a snack.”

“Okay I can go for a bag of Cheetos.” We both walked to the convenience store which is only 2 minutes away to buy our snacks.

Walking back to the building I feel sweat going down my neck, I take out a tissue from my handbag and begin to wipe the sweat off.

Lucy says “I know it’s hot again and we are having a *Heat Wave* since this is the fourth day in a row.”

“You said it, Lucy. I can take the heat only, it is the most humid of all days, reaching close to 100 degrees.”

We enter the building and go up the escalator to our department. I go straight to my desk to sit down. I place my handbag on my desk and my bag of Cheetos near my phone while I open the bag and take some. Lucy heads straight to the ladies room before going to her desk.

I turn my computer back on and look at my first cover. I figured I would make some corrections this afternoon. Once Lucy comes back from the ladies room she walks strangely to her desk as she sits down. Seems to me like she surprisingly got her monthly. She places her handbag on the chair beside her and the bag of chips on her desk. She opens her bag to take a few.

My boss comes back from his lunch as I see him walking towards my desk. He says, “Sarina, I had a filling fall out as I was eating lunch. I made a quick dentist appointment this afternoon. I will leave at 3:30 p.m. and I will absolutely check out your first cover tomorrow. If my phone rings before I leave can you take down my messages for me? I just don’t feel well enough to answer any of my calls.”

“Of course, I wish you good luck at the dentist.” He walks into his office and sits down to do some work before he leaves.

While I continue eating my Cheetos I start to make corrections quickly. I want to have the first cover done and ready to print before I leave for the day.

The hours go by and my boss has left for his dentist appointment. I get up and walk over to take a cup of ice water from the water fountain as I bring it back to my desk. While sipping the water it sure makes me feel cool and hydrated.

It is finally 4:45 p.m. and I want to make sure I’m done with the design. I save it on file and send it to print. Closing up my software application I walk over to the printer to take my print job. I look at it and decide to place it in a beige folder.

"Wow." I whisper.

Larry gets up from his desk and is ready to leave.. He winks at me as I go back to my desk to grab my handbag. I say, "Goodnight."

He says, “You as well darling.”

“Oh Boy.” I mumble.

Lucy waits for me and we both walk out together as we exit the building. She says, "I saw the big boss leave early and I happened to look at his face. He did not look well."

"It’s because he lost a filling at lunch, so he made a dentist appointment right away."

"Oh shit, Sarina. He might be grumpy tomorrow for sure."

Lucy walks to her car and waves bye as I say, "Goodnight. See you in the morning."

Walking to my car I unlock the door and get in quick. The seat is so hot as I roll down my windows and start the car to drive back home. As I head on the highway from the exit, there is a vehicle stuck in the breakdown lane. The car is overheating badly and a man in a dress shirt and pants is standing beside it in a sweat. He is talking on his cell phone and probably waiting for a tow truck to arrive. Traffic is moving very slow since all eyes are looking at the car overheating.

"Let’s pick up the pace, please!" I shout out the window.

About 45 minutes later I am exhausted as I arrive home. I roll up the windows and park. As I get out of my car sweat is sliding down my back. It feels gross and I can't wait to change into my shorts and t-shirt. I enter my apartment and lock the door. Placing my handbag and folder on my bureau I change into my shorts and t-shirt. My work clothes go into the hamper for the laundry on Friday night.

"I want to see if my music box moved again." I whisper.

Walking into the living room I take a look.

It seems fine to me because I know exactly where I left it. The air conditioner is on low as I walk into the kitchen to start my dinner. I feel like making pizza tonight.

Taking the pizza dough out from the fridge I place it on the counter. I chop up a bit of onion and place it in a frying pan with a little olive oil. Pouring some tomato sauce I add a pinch of salt and pepper. I roll the dough out onto a greased baking pan. Once the sauce is ready I pour it on top of the dough along with chopped black olives and grated cheese. Once that is done into the oven it goes for about 25 minutes at 375.

As I wait for the pizza to bake I turn the television on to watch the news. Setting the table and pouring a glass of wine; I begin to make a salad to have with the pizza.

A commercial comes on and I hear about a store that is having an event this coming weekend. It so happens to be Eric's shop.

"Nice, I hope to be there this weekend to see what it’s all about!” I shout.

After my supper I’ll have my ice-coffee that I left in the fridge, from, this morning. Tonight I have to design my second cover before I change into my pajamas. Later on I will watch my shows before I call it a night.

The pizza is finally ready and it smells so good. Shutting the oven off I take it out and place it on top of the stove. I slice it into pieces as I take two and put them on a paper plate. Walking to the table I finally sit my ass down.

"Delicious!" I shout. Taking a bite.

Within 15 minutes I was done with two slices and a ½ glass of wine. I went to grab another slice and pour a little bit more wine into my glass.

When I finished supper and washed the dishes I had another idea pop into my head while watching a commercial. I go into my bedroom to get my folder which contains the first cover and blank white pieces of paper. Before I sit down I grab my coffee and go back into the kitchen to start drawing.

About an hour and a half later I finished with the design, I happened to look up and I saw the pink light flowing right into the kitchen. It is coming straight at me. I felt scared for a while, but knew something weird might happen again. I get up from my chair and I am directly upon it. I move and walk towards the living room; it is following me towards the music box. I approach the music box and I open it. The crystal is spinning around like before.

My hand is shaking as I stare at it. Suddenly, my hand slips and the cover closes once more. The pink light vanishes into mid air.

“Oh my goodness this music box is magical. I just don’t know what it is trying to tell me!” I shout.

I place it back on the bookshelf and go into the kitchen to put my folder away in my bedroom. I feel a little dizzy this time. I think it’s because I was staring at the pink flowing light coming at me and then staring at the crystal spinning round and round.

Going into the bathroom I grab a face cloth. I run ice cold water on it. I bring it into the living room and lie down while placing it on my forehead. Turning the television on I whisper, “I just can’t tell my mother or Lucy about what is happening to me.”

My show is about to begin and I feel a little better as I still leave the face cloth on my forehead.

Two hours went by and nothing unusual happened.

“ The next time I hear or see anything coming from the music box, I must turn the key to activate the music tone. Maybe that is what it wants me to do.*”* I whisper.

It is almost time for the evening news and I want to see what the weather is going to be like for tomorrow. I just hope for a little cooler.

Before I change the channel to the news, I get up from the sofa to grab an apple and a glass of ice water from the fridge. I don’t need my face cloth anymore. I place it back into the bathroom and watch the news.

As soon as I ate my apple and the news was over, I called it a night.

My alarm clock is going off very loud this time on a Wednesday morning. While I get up from my bed and put my bathrobe and slippers on, I begin to feel dizzy again. “Oh shit!” I shout.

I tried to walk fast into the bathroom and I couldn’t help it and vomited right into the trash bucket near my toilet. The dizziness is absolutely from last night while I was staring at the pink light and spinning crystal.

“I have to call out sick.” I whisper.

Carefully walking to grab my cell phone I dial the company’s phone number and it rings only twice. My boss happens to answer and says, “Morning, U-Trade.”

I answer, “Morning sir, this is Sarina, I am sorry to say that I am not feeling well this morning. I woke up dizzy. I think it’s best for me to work from home. I hope to have all three cover designs ready for you to look at tomorrow.”

“Okay, Sarina, no worries. I will see you tomorrow. Take care.”

We both hung up.

Before I put my cell phone away I text Lucy. “*Hey Lucy I am not feeling well and I just called out sick. I will text you later. Have a good day.”*

About ten minutes later Lucy texted back. *“I’ll miss you at lunch today. Hope you feel better.”*  Lucy’s text shows a big smiley face.

I walk into my bedroom to grab my folder as I place it on the coffee table in the living room. As soon as I try to eat something I will begin to design the third cover.

Walking slowly into the kitchen I feel like making toasted waffles. I also began to brew some hazelnut flavored coffee. The coffee sure smells good and hopefully I will be fine after I eat.

I don’t have to hurry to take a shower because I am not going to work today. I will even stay in my pajamas while working on the next cover. Afterwards, I will brush my teeth, wash my face and shave my hairy armpits.

My waffles are ready as I take a cup of coffee and carefully sit down to eat. I sure don’t want to trigger any vomiting. So far so good as I take bite after bite. Turning the television on to watch the news the weather is on. They are saying we might have a thunderstorm this afternoon.

“Good!” I whisper.

After I ate breakfast and cleaned up, I went into the living room to lie down for only a ½ hour watching the news.

Looking at the music box all seemed quiet as I suddenly got a great idea. “I will draw the music box into my third cover as a symbol that it represents your future goals kept inside. I do hope my boss will like this one.” I whisper.

The news is over as I shut the television off. I take a piece of paper to start drawing while I kneel on a throw pillow near the coffee table. First, I decide on the headline and then the layout of where to draw the music box.

*“*I wonder if Eric is experiencing the same phenomenon as I am with his music box.” I whisper.

I feel okay as I continue to work and all is quiet as time goes by. Turning my head to look at the kitchen clock a few hours have passed.

While I make a few corrections I am amazed at how beautiful the third cover came out to be. The music box that I designed is a perfect match to the real thing.

I stand up and begin to stretch my legs and I seem to be myself again. “Thank God the dizziness is gone!” I shout.

My stomach is growling and it is lunchtime. Walking into the kitchen I feel like having a tuna sandwich. I open the cabinet and take out a can of tuna and mayo from the fridge as I toast two pieces of white bread.

Once the bread is toasted I make my tuna sandwich. Looking out the kitchen window it’s starting to rain. I hear a little thunder, but not as loud as I thought it would be. My sandwich is ready to eat as I place it on a paper plate and grab a bottle of water from the fridge.

Sitting down I take a bite and it tastes fine. My cell phone beeps as I know I just received a text message which I will check right after I eat.

Within twenty minutes I finish eating and I clean up in the kitchen. I grab my cell phone to check my message. It was Lucy and it says, “*How are you feeling? Larry, your love, was asking for you this morning*.”

I reply back, “*Very funny, ha...ha. Feeling much better, thanks. I happened to finish all three designs. I will see you tomorrow.*”

She replies back, “*Okay see you then.*”

I place my cell phone on the coffee table and then go into the bathroom to brush my teeth. I wash my face, shave my armpits and brush my hair. As soon as I am done, I enter my bedroom to throw on a clean pair of underwear and shorts along with a clean bra and long sleeve summer t-shirt.

Walking back into the living room I look out the window and the mailman is delivering the mail for my apartment building. I grab my house keys as I exit out of my apartment to get my mail.

Arriving at my mailbox I receive a Macy’s bill and my Glamour magazine. I start to walk back to my apartment as I meet up with Henry. He says “Hi Sarina. No work today?”

“Hi Henry. I woke up a little dizzy this morning and I decided to call out sick and work from home.”

“Oh, that sounds good and I hope you feel much better. I will see you soon.”

“Thanks, Henry. See you soon.” Back into my apartment I go.

Placing my mail on the kitchen table till later, I feel a little sleepy and I have to lie down on the sofa for a while. I close my eyes and slowly feel myself falling asleep.

I start to hear a humming noise and quickly wake up. And, of course, the pink light is flowing out of the music box again. “That’s just great!” I shout.

Getting up from the sofa I walk towards the music box as I carefully open it. The pink crystal is spinning round and round. My heart is beating super fast this time. “Calm down heart.” I whisper.

This time around I remembered I must turn the key to activate the music tone. So, I slowly turn the key and an old melody starts to play. As I stare at the pink crystal something strange is happening. I just can’t believe what is appearing right before my eyes.

It looks like some kind of portal opening, clear as can be, in front of me. I can see another realm as I walk into it and suddenly collapse.

**Chapter 3**

**A New City**

My body feels strange as I begin to wake up. I carefully open my eyes and I notice that I am no longer in my New York City apartment. There is a beautiful bluebird resting on my stomach. He is just sitting there staring at me.

“Well hello there.” I whisper.

I sit up and the bluebird flies onto the grass beside me. I feel nervous and excited at the same time, wondering “ *Where in the world am I?*”

I know for a fact I experienced some kind of supernatural phenomenon. Which, I never believed it could possibly exist.

The music box is in my right hand with the key in place. I look up and the sky is incredibly blue. The temperature is nice and warm, not too hot and not too humid. As I carefully stand up I can see a beautiful city from a distance less than a mile away. There are short and tall buildings that seem to somehow glow when the sun’s rays hit the city.

“This music box is definitely very powerful and there must be a reason why I am here. I can’t let myself be afraid to walk to that city for some answers. “ I whisper.

“How the heck am I going to go back home!” I shout.

I begin to walk at a comfortable pace with my music box in my hand. Hopefully I won’t get any blisters on my feet, since I only have open toe slippers on. The bluebird starts to fly following me as I walk through the beautiful grass. It is a mint green in color, not like the weed grass that I usually see back in New York City. It is cut nice and tight.

There are two white doves resting on a large white wood tree with tiny pink flowers covering the branches. Passing the tree there are flowers that look like dandelions that are dark blue in color.. Across from there is a huge farm. I can see cows, pigs and chickens wandering about. A man and a little boy see me and wave. I wave back. Further down from there is a church. As I come upon it, it looks like it is made of white-washed vintage brick. There is a sign with red lettering that reads:  *The* *Practice of all Religions without degrading and causing harm to others. For anyone who does harm shall be deported back to where they came.* A colorful statue of a winged man that is kneeling with his sword stands in front of the garden. It is Saint Michael.

I walk over and touch the statue as I kneel.

I continue to walk and inch my way closer to the city, I nervously stop, I notice a long silver train. It is moving quite fast around the back of the city and looks exactly like one of those *bullet trains*. Only, there is no existence of railroad tracks. The train is hovering about 4 or 5 inches above the ground.

“How is that possible!” I shout.

Continuing to walk again I am about ⅓ of a mile away as I also notice people walking about. They look like normal people with up to date clothing. I can see a white pavement street and there are some cars going by. The body of the cars seem like ordinary looking cars, except, the windshield is more curved inward. There is a metal spiral antenna on the back hood of each car. The registration plates are on the cars, but I just can’t see what they say. The colors of the cars that I see are silver, beige, blue, black, red and white. I can also see the buildings better and they look like they are made of palm size clear crystal stones. The *bullet train* is approaching a drop off station and is still hovering at least 4 or 5 inches above the ground.

Within a few minutes I finally arrive at this fascinating city and I feel like I have to touch one of the buildings. I am absolutely amazed, it does seem to be made of clear crystal stones. In fact the whole city is made that way. The short buildings seem to be stores. The tall buildings are business like companies as one sign says *City Bank* and another one says *City Registry of Vehicles.* Walking further there is a white thin pole with a big sign that reads: *General Hospital* straight ahead and *Children’s Hospital* next block. The same white trees are at the corners of each sidewalk. The cars are moving as usual and there are traffic lights that are quite different. The traffic lights are on wires, only, the colors are strange. It looks like blue for going*,* white *slow down* and purple for *stop*. What’s very strange is the traffic lights are hovering in the air on wires with no poles attached to them. A car drives right by meand slows down, when you hear a robotic voice say, “*Warning approaching metal device*.” The car stops and a man quickly gets out of the car and picks up a long nail. There happens to be a voice activated sensor equipped to the cars.

“My goodness that sure is amazing!” I shout.

A young lady walking with a baby in a carriage says, “Hi there. You look like a newcomer.”

I look at her and whisper, “How do you know that?”

“In this city we all kind of know each other. The population is only about 1,000 so far and I can tell when a newcomer arrives. They all want to touch a building right away. I saw you touch it from a distance. My name is Caren with a C not K. By the way, Tira, will be expecting you.”

“My name is Sarina and who is Tira?”

She smiles at me and says, “You will mysteriously find out. Just follow the stores on your right and look for *The Choc-O-Late Shop*. It is right before the *Supa-market*. I hope to see you again.” She waves bye.

I wave bye and continue to walk on the side where all the stores are. As I walk by there is a shoe store named *Ital Mode*. “Must be Italian shoes.” I whisper.

After that there is a Department store named *La Boutique*. Walking along I look from the front of the store and the clothes look awesome. It looks similar to Macy’s in New York that must have French owners. As I walk further there is a store named *Herrenbekleidung*. “That definitely is German.” I whisper.

There are so many incredible and interesting stores as I walk along the sidewalk. I even notice an African department store as I look from outside the glass window. It is a handcrafted store which also sells beautiful handbags. A block down is Crystal City Appliances.

Within minutes I arrive at *The Choc-O-Late Shop* and on the sign above the store there is a picture of a giant piece of chocolate. Opening the door I walk in. Some customers are with their children and say “hello” to me.

While I look at the types of candy they are making me hungry.

I say “hi” and ask if anyone in the candy store is Tira. A lady at the register shouts, “That would be me over here!”

Walking towards the register and getting close to her she is a petite young lady. Her hair is black to her chin with a few pink highlights. I couldn’t help noticing her tiny pointy ears and cat-shaped brown eyes. She has light pink lipstick on her lips and black eye-liner on top of her eyelids. She is wearing a black short-sleeve knit shirt with a sparkly blue satin skirt to her knees. On her feet are black comfy flats. She is the cutest thing I have ever seen as she says, in a kind of Scottish accent, “I have been expecting someone new to arrive.”

“I am Sarina and it is very exciting to meet you.”

Tira steps away from the register to allow an employee to take over and says, “I welcome you to *CRYSTAL CITY,* Sarina. The pink light from your music box that came from the crystal probably frightened you. I am happy that you figured out how to activate the portal. Now, let’s talk more outside on the bench in front of the store.”

“Of course.” I whisper.

We both walk to the door together and exit out to take a seat on the bench. It is made of white metal that has a backing attached. There are two black lawn pillows and we both grab one to place against our backs.

I speak up first and whisper, “I just want to let you know that I have my slippers on and I have walked close to a mile to reach this city. I kind of feel weird walking around with them on. I noticed people here were staring at my feet.”

Tira smiles at me and says, “Not to worry, I will buy you a pair of footwear from the Italian shoe store. A wonderful mother and daughter work there. The mother is the owner of the business.”

I am so excited and shout, “Oh, my goodness thank you, Tira!”

Tira takes a deep breath and says, “I know you have many questions, so, I will fill you in about me first. I am what you would call a fairy. I am married to one and his name is Willo. He helps out at the German menswear store and occasionally at other stores.. Just like I help out at *The Choc-O-Late Shop* and other stores when needed. We are the only two fairies in this city, but I will be expecting a little one soon. I am only a couple months along. We are from a place where there is an evil king who controls the fairy’s in his kingdom. He wanted us to steal from the wealthy. Willo and I refused so the king banished us to a place of non-existence. The king didn’t know that Willo and I have a much greater power. I have the ability to levitate objects and Willow has the ability to transform matter, such as solids, liquids and gasses etc. This is how *CRYSTAL CITY* came about. At the very beginning, Willo began transforming rocks into clear crystal stones.”

“Wow, that explains the hovering bullet train, the street lights and the beautiful crystal stone buildings.”

“Willo and I had an idea when we saw your world through a crystal. We decided to create a city of our own that will absolutely have no crime. Allowing people from many nations of your world entering this city. Hoping to bring knowledge here, such as, your medical doctors, school teachers, building designers, car designers, technicians and anyone who wants to run their own business.”

“That is unbelievable, Tira. I have my music box and engraved on it are wings that look like wings of a fairy. Do you and Willow have wings?”

“We do, Sarina. They are tiny ones, white in color that appear on our back.”

I am amazed that I am talking to an actual fairy as I whisper, “Before I purchased the music box it seemed to whisper out to me. There were three of them.”

“Well of course, Sarina, it whispers out to the ones that have a good soul. Those music boxes are from the place Willo and I came from, they are dated 1909. The only thing is that one of the three music boxes has a crystal missing because Willo keeps it to open portals onto your world. He leaves the music boxes to be auctioned in many nations. Once the music box connects with good souls and he or she purchases the music box, they have to figure out how to activate the portal without being frightened of the pink light coming from the crystal. Then, when each person arrives and decides to stay here, they are allowed to go back to their homes with the music box. Also, any family member can enter, bringing each a bag full of belongings. They must all understand that no crime can be committed or they can be transported back to their own country.”

“Oh, that is why one of the men that purchased the other music box wanted to buy mine, because he probably doesn’t have the pink crystal. He seems like a non-trusting evil man,Tira, and must know about this place. The other music box was purchased by another man. He owns an antique shop and I just hope he didn’t sell it.”

“I must tell you this, Sarina, if that evil man gets his hands on it and knows about *Crystal City* he will be able to enter.”

“I wish the other man that bought the music box would figure out how to activate it and enter this beautiful city. He must have placed it at his shop for sure. I met him at the auction and he is a very handsome man indeed.”

“You sound like you have feelings for this man, Sarina.”

“I honestly do, Tira.”

Tira begins to get up and she says, “You will meet my husband soon and I would like for you to join us for dinner. For now let’s take a walk to *Ital Mode* for a pair of footwear*.*”

I also get up as I ask Tira, “Where do the families live when they arrive?”

“For the time being, a building designer from your world along with Willo created apartment buildings. I will show you before you meet Willo. The main lobby has 8 sofas for the tenants to rest, read or occupy their knowledge working. It has an area in the back of the buildings for anyone who wants to exercise and for the children who want to meet and play.”

“Incredible!” I shout.

While walking Tira says, “What do you do for a living back in your city, Sarina?”

“I work at a company called U-TRADE as an administrative assistant. It is not what I went to college for. I don’t know if you understand what I am talking about. A college is a higher education school.”

“I certainly do, Sarina, from the teachers who have entered here. *CRYSTAL CITY* has a college now along with a school for the little ones and a school for grades 7-12.”

“That is awesome, Tira. I graduated with a degree in illustration design and my boss has asked me to design 3 covers for the company’s new magazine. He will choose one of them. I designed one yesterday at my job, one last night and one this morning at my apartment. I called out sick from work today because I followed the pink light to the music box last night. I was very dizzy afterwards. You see, if I stare at something for quite a while I begin to get dizzy. This morning I decided to turn the key to activate the music tone and that is when the portal opened and how I am here now.”

We arrive at *Ital Mode* and before Tira opens the entrance door she says, “Maybe you can open your own illustration design business here.”

“I wish!” I shout as we enter the store.

The second I saw the shoes they were so beautiful as Tira says, “Take a walk around and pick out a few you would like to try on.”

“Sure it might take at least 30 minutes before I decide, since they are all beautiful.”

“Not to worry, Sarina, I will go over and talk to the store owner and help her out.”

Tira walks over to the store owner and begins to chat with her. She has an Italian accent as she speaks. I go over to the shoes with the flat heels first. And of course, the shoes say genuine leather on the tag. I pick out a shoe and then go over to the sandals. There are wedge style, high heeled and low heeled sandals. I picked out a wedge and low heels. Next, I go to the sneakers and the design of the sneakers are quite unique. I pick out two different ones as I am now ready for a clerk to search for my sizes.

A clerk sees me standing around and waiting as she walks up to me. She looks about 18 or 19 years old and says, “In what size would you like each one in?”

“I will try size 7 first on each, please.”

“Of course, My name is Pina and I will come back with the shoes and sandals first. Then, I will get the sneakers for you.”

“I’m Sarina, and that is fine with me.”

Once she leaves I grab a seat quickly. Customers are starting to arrive and it looks like it’s going to be busy. The customers seem like business workers at their lunch. Tira is still chatting with the owner and looks over at me and smiles.

The clerk comes back with my shoes and sandals and says, “Make sure you walk around with each of them and I will be back with the sneakers.”

“Thanks, Pina.”

Opening the box of shoes first, I take them out and slide them on. The leather feels so soft and comfortable as I walk around. I then go back to my seat and try on the sandals next. The wedge pair looks really nice as I take them out and put them on. I walk around. Going back to my seat again, I try the low heeled sandals and do the same.

As I go back to my seat Pina comes over with my sneakers. An elderly man walks by and says, “How are you doing Ms. Farino? How’s your first year in college treating you?”

I look at her and I feel my heart suddenly beat fast as she says, “I am doing just fine. I took some exams and I absolutely passed.”

The elderly man says, “Very good young lady. I came in to buy a pair of sneakers to start doing some walking.” He walks to the sneakers and begins to check them out.

While I try on the first pair of sneakers I must ask Pina if she is related to Anthony Farino. I thought about it as I walked around with the sneakers that felt so amazing on my feet. Going back to my seat I try the next pair and walk around. The first pair felt better because the leather is much softer with the soles of the sneakers having a white invisible cushion.

Once I go back to my seat I make a decision down to two of the footwear. Pina walks by after she hands the elderly man his sneakers and says, “How is everything?”

“All is good and I have to make a decision between the wedge sandals or the leather sneakers. You can take the other ones back and I will wait for you here.”

“Sure, I will be back in a few.”

Pina comes back within 10 minutes and I whisper, “I would like to ask you a question before you take me to the register. You might as well sit down that way no one listens to what I have to say.”

“Okay.”

“Well, I heard the elderly man call you Ms. Farino. Are you in any way related to Anthony Farino?”

Pina looks very frightened as she whispers, “Why do you ask?”

“Back in New York City I went to an auction and he was there. He purchased the same music box as I did. After the auction I saw him again at a pizza restaurant and he wanted to buy my music box. I told him “No” and I could not understand why he wanted another one. I will describe him for you. He has dark brown eyes and black hair with a little gray at the sides above the ear. He is medium built and is about 6 feet tall. He was wearing a pinstripe suit and when I watch the news his name often comes up for criminal activity.”

Pina looks at me with big eyes and says, “You did describe him right. He is my father and to me he might as well be dead. While I was growing up he was a good father and he had a decent job. Then, one day when I turned 12 his company announced a lay-off. He was so heartbroken that after they gave him pay for only 3 months, he could not find a job well enough to support me and my mother with a big mortgage. My mother was also pregnant and miscarried because of always worrying. He took a turn for the worst possible way to make a living. A life of crime.”

Pina takes a deep breath and says, “ I went on vacation to Brazil when I graduated highschool and I ended up buying a music box at an auction. When I got home to New York a pink light came out of the music box. I was scared at first, but I turned the key and that is when a portal opened for me. I was curious to see what was on the other side. When I entered this mysterious place I knew it was where I needed to escape. This is how I am here and my mum came with me. She is the store owner of *Ital Mode*.”

“This is so unreal, Pina. You know if he gets his hands on the other music box that another man purchased; he will be able to enter, especially since he knows you two are here.”

“I do know and I hope when you go back to New York City while you make your decision about coming back; that, you make sure my dad doesn’t get his hands on the other music box. I won’t tell my mother about your encounter with him. She might get so nervous and start to worry every day. It just won’t be good for her business.”

“Okay, I am only going to mention what we talked about to Tira.”

“Sounds good, Sarina.” We both get up and walk to the register.

Pina arrives at the register and talks to Tira. I wait in line and I can hear her talking as she says, “Sarina, made a decision down to two footwear styles and she will choose one of them at the register.”

Tira says,“Not a problem, I will buy both for her. She can treat me to dinner someday when she comes back to stay.”

I listen to Tira and I know in my mind that I will be back to stay.

Waiting in line I happen to look at how the customers are purchasing merchandise. It seems like each customer has a credit/debit card with a thumb print embedded in it. When the customers swipe the card the computer screen tells them to place their thumb on the small computer screen for a match.

“Unbelievable.” I whisper.

I am now at the register and Tira says, “I hope you found what you were looking for and Pina did mention you like two styles. Therefore, I will buy both for you.”

I didn’t want Tira to know that I overheard her while waiting in line as I whispered, “Why thank you so much, Tira. I will put the sneakers on before I leave the store.”

“That’s exactly what I would expect you to do. I will give you a carryon bag so you can carry the other pair along with your slippers.” Tira swipes her card, places her thumb on the screen and hands me the bag with the other pair inside.

Tira says, “I will be only 15 more minutes at the register as you can change into your sneakers. I even placed a pair of low-cut socks in your bag to go with your sneakers. They are free with the purchase of two footwear.”

“Thank you.” I whisper.

Leaving the register I walk to take a seat to put on my sneakers. I see Pina taking the elderly man to purchase his sneakers at the register. She gives him a hug and kiss on the cheek as she moves onto the next customer.

“*It sure is a good thing that she has two other employees helping her out.*” I thought.

My sneakers are on as I place the slippers inside the bag with the sandals. I also slide in the music box. I decided to wait for Tira at the front of the store. I notice three businessmen in suits entering with badges around their neckline. One man is Japanese, another African/American and the other man is British with a woman beside him. The Japanese and the African/American are busy talking.

The writing on the badges are in red ink as it reads:  *Alfa Auto Mfg.*

All of a sudden, I felt a tap on my shoulder as I turned around and it’s Tira. She says, “How do your sneakers feel?”

“Very comfortable and my feet thank you.”

Tira laughs as we exit out of the shoe store. She says, “Let’s walk across the street and I will show you the apartment buildings next.”

“Sure!” I shout.

We cross the street as the cars are stopped waiting for the light to change. There are some restaurants on the same side that we are about to walk to. When we are across I whisper, “Tira, I do have another question to ask.”

“Absolutely, Sarina, just ask.”

“I was curious to know about bank accounts and what do people do when they enter *Crystal City* with their money?”

“Everyone asks that question and I will be happy to tell you. They close out their bank accounts and have the bank issue a check under their name. Then the person/persons entering *CRYSTAL CITY*, will have that check deposited at *Crystal City Bank* once they open an account. Just like your world, each person will have their own account number issued. We have someone who converts each check that is from different countries to the city’s own money calculation. Therefore, they will not lose out on what they have earned. And, they are given a plastic card to carefully use without worrying about paper money here.”

“That sure is amazing, Tira. I actually saw a few customers swiping that card. It looks like a credit/debit card that we use back in my world.”

“Exactly, Sarina. The only thing is, each card has their own thumb print on the front for security reasons with a 4 digit number embedded on the back.”

While we continue to walk the passing people shout, “Hi Tira!”

Tira shouts, “Hello!”

I finally decided that I should mention to Tira what I know about Pina. Whispering I say, “Do you remember the man I told you that had the other music box that seemed non trusting to me?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Well, it so happens that his name is Anthony Farino and Pina is his daughter from *Ital Mode.* I found out when a customer walked in and called Pina by her last name. Then, I asked Pina after I made my decision on the footwear if she was related to Anthony Farino. She was nervous at first and finally said that he is her father. To her he is dead and she came to *CRYSTAL CITY* to escape from his evil ways and brought her mother with her.”

We both stop walking for a moment as Tira says, “That sure is incredible how you met her at *Ital Mode*, if it wasn’t for your slippers and for me to offer to buy you a pair of footwear.”

“Exactly, it seems like we were destined to meet.”

Tira looks at me and points as she says, “We are here at the apartment buildings.”

I look and the building is absolutely amazing. It is 10 stories high and the crystal stones on the building are glowing brightly from the rays of the sun. There is a glass sliding door as we both enter. Upon entering Tira starts to explain the interior lobby as she says, “What you see on each side of the lobby are two Roman Pillars designed by a building designer from Milan, Italy. Close to the top part of each he engraved wings that resemble mine and Willo’s. The pillars are 8 feet high. The floor is made of white and gray marble tiles that the designer also made. Willow saw how the tiles were made one day while we were visiting Rome. Now, if you look up at the ceiling you will see 7 Globe Pendant lights that move around in the center.”

I look up and the lights are hovering in mid air about 2 inches from the ceiling and moving in a circular rotation. One of the lights started to flicker and Tira said, “Sarina, forgive me for just a moment while I fix the problem.”

“Sure, Tira.”

I look at her and right before my eyes, two clear white tiny wings begin to appear on her shoulders. She points her right finger towards the Globe Pendant light that is flickering and begins to swirl her finger around. A small pink light ignites from her fingertip. The Globe Pendant light starts to move and makes its way down towards Tira as she says, “Oh, it’s just a little loose.”

Tira tightens it and swirls her right finger around again and it goes back up to the other Globe Pendant lights.

“That sure was AWESOME!” I shout.

“Thank you, Sarina.”

Her wings quickly vanish as we both start to walk towards the sofas. There are 4 in a row and 4 facing opposite the other as Tira says, “These sofas are made of crushed velvet. The table in between them is made of tempered glass with chrome legs. Willo saw the design of the table at a hotel in France.“

“Amazing, Tira!” I shout.

“Why don’t you try the sofa out for yourself?”

I take a seat and it sure feels soft on my legs and but.

Tira then points to the two 4 feet high plants on the sides of the elevators that are straight ahead and says, “Those plants are cactus flower plants from Brazil. Willo actually brought them back when he left the music boxes at a hotel to be auctioned. He told me the plants were out front away from the entrance and that he wasn’t stealing.”

I begin to laugh as I get up from the sofa walking towards the plants. The flowers on the cactus are bright orange in color.

Tira walks up to me and says, “Well, what do you think of the lobby?”

“I absolutely love it.”

“Very good, Sarina. When you decide to come back here to live I would love to show you an apartment. There are many available with more buildings around the back. You can own an apartment for less than in your world. At the moment no houses are built. Anyway, I want you to meet my husband .”

“Absolutely, I can’t wait to meet him.” We walk back to the sliding door and exit out.

Walking back on the sidewalk and waiting for the stoplight to change Tira says, “What kinds of food do you like to eat?”

“Oh my goodness, I like roast pork, thick juicy hamburgers, fried or baked chicken and pasta dishes. Just to name a few?”

“Sounds good, Sarina. You can pick a restaurant for dinner that way I don’t have to do any cooking tonight.”

We begin to cross the street to where the stores are as I shout, “Fantastic!”

We make it across the street and only two stores down is *Herrenbekleidung*, where Willo is helping out. Tira opens the door and we both enter and it is quite busy with men waiting in a long line at the register. Tira waves to one of the two men at the register and he waves back. When I take a look at him he is over 6 feet tall and has a muscular build. His hair is short and brown in color with two thin blue highlights on the right side of his hair. His eyes are blue, and of course, he has small pointy ears. Wearing black pants and a blue and white striped button-down shirt, he looks at Tira and shouts, “I will be only a few minutes more!”

Tira sees cushioned chairs at the front of the store and sits down on one of them. I do the same as she whispers, “What do you think of my husband?”

“I thought he would be petite like you. I am really impressed.” Tira laughs out loud.

There is a clock on the wall as I look at it and it’s 5:00 p.m. Tira says, “Once Willo is done and ready to leave we are heading for dinner.”

“Okay by me, Tira.” I look over and Willo is leaving the register and walking straight towards us.

We both get up from the chairs as Willo approaches and kisses Tira on the cheek.

Willo looks at me and says, “You are a newcomer and must be one from New York. Glad to see you made it.”

“Thank you. I am Sarina.” He shakes my hand and all three of us exit the store.

As we are in front of the store Tira turns to Willo and says, “We are taking Sarina to dinner as soon as she decides on a restaurant.”

Willo wraps his arm around Tira and says, “Good, I am so hungry. It’s been a busy day at *Herrenbekleidung*.”

I look up to Willo and say,“I have made a decision. I can surely go for a juicy hamburger.”

Tira and Willo both shout, “Absolutely!”

Walking across the street again and passing *City Bank* we came upon a restaurant called, *Hamburger Palace*. Willo says, “This is a great place for your juicy hamburger, Sarina.”

Willo opens the door for us and we walk in. There is a man at the front desk and he says, “Hello Willo, Tira and young lady. It will be only a few minutes for a table.”

Willo takes a seat on the wooden bench as he says, “No problem. We will sit down while we wait.” Tira sits down next to Willo and I next to Tira.

Within minutes a table is ready as a young girl walks us to our table. The tables look like they are made of redwood with chairs that have a leather back lining to them.

I look at Willo and I say, “This sure looks like a very relaxing place to eat.”

“It sure is, Sarina. I helped out the owner by designing the tables. I am sure Tira must of, told you about what we both are capable of doing.”

“Yes she did. I saw proof of that at one of the apartment buildings.”

Before the waitress comes over Willo says, “I will show you some of my own power. Select the type of metal or wood you would like this table to change into, Sarina.”

“Okay, how about platinum.”

I look at Willow and the same clear white tiny wings start to appear on his shoulders. He waves his hand slowly over the table and the redwood table slowly transforms into platinum metal. I felt the wood change underneath my right hand that was resting on the table as my eyes were glued to the changing of platinum.

“You know how much platinum is worth back in my world. That is INCREDIBLE!” I shout.

“Thanks, Sarina.” Willo waves his hand the opposite way and the table changes back to redwood. Within seconds his wings disappear.

Tira smiles at Willow and says, “Enough for now, you can show Sarina more on the liquids that you can also transform later.”

The waitress comes over and asks if we would like to order any drinks.

Tira says, “Of course, I will have a glass of lemon water on ice.”

Willo says, “I will have an ice cold beer.”

The waitress looks at me next as I say, “I also will have an ice cold beer.”

The waitress hands us the menus and says, “I will be back with your drinks and hopefully y’all will be ready to order.” She quietly walks away.

I am curious about her accent and I whisper, “She has a Southern American accent.”

Willo says, “Yes, Sarina. She is from your country and the state is Tennessee.”

“Cool!” I shout.

We each look at the menus and know what we want.

Willo and Tira look at each other as Tira says, “I want my hamburger well done.”

“I know, Tira. You got sick last month on a hamburger that was not cooked enough because of the baby.”

The waitress comes over with our drinks and Willo says, “We are all set to order.”

Willo orders a cheeseburger medium-rare with steak fries. Tira orders a hamburger well-done with a baked potato. And, I order a hamburger well-done with string fries.

The waitress says, “Very good and y’all will get a mixed garden salad for three, on the house. What dressings would each of you like?”

At the same time we say, “Italian.”

The waitress takes our menus and walks to the front desk to drop them off. As we slowly drink our drinks I start thinking about how I love being with Tira and Willow. They both make me feel like I belong here. Hopefully, when I go back to New York I will mention to Eric about a wonderful place that awaits him.

In 10 minutes the waitress comes over with the garden salad and three salad bowls and says, “Here is your salad with fresh baked oven rolls and your order will be coming up shortly.” She walks away.

“This looks good. It is how I make my salad with chopped black olives and cucumbers.” I whisper.

All three of us grab some salad with a roll and start to nibble. As I eat I decide to ask Willo an important question that just came to mind. I ask and whisper, “By the way, Willo, how do I get back to New York City in order for me to go to work tomorrow. I have 3 designs to show my boss and I don’t want to be fired for not calling or showing up. I do hate to leave this beautiful city so soon.”

Tira looks at Willow and they both quietly laugh as Willo says, “Don’t worry, Tira must of, told you I have one of the crystals that I use to open portals onto your world. You can depart between 8:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. if you like. That way you can relax at home before you go to sleep tonight. After we have our dinner we still have time to show you more of our realm. Such as, I know you will be interested to see our new cell tower. It is located 2000 feet away from the city because of signal interference with the crystal stones on the buildings and for safety reasons. Also, I hope you would like to see the Auto Mfg. Plant. which is only 2 miles away from here.”

“Oh boy, YES!”

There is a clock at the bar and I look at the time. It is 6:00 p.m. and suddenly our food arrives. The hamburgers are 2 inches thick and look so yummy. The waitress says, “I also brought a fresh bottle of ketchup for y’all.”

We shout, “Thank You!” She smiles and walks to her next table across from us.

Willo says, “Pour the ketchup on your hamburger first, Sarina. I will then pour some for Tira and myself.”

I grab the ketchup as I pour a little on and then hand it to Willo. Taking a bite of my hamburger you can surely taste the freshness of the meat. As I take another bite it just happens to be the best hamburger I have ever had.

Willo takes a bite of his and so does Tira. Once she finishes chewing she says, “This is perfectly well-done and delicious.”

“You said it, Tira.!” I shout.

Taking a bite of my french fry, it is just the way I prefer it to be; extra crispy and lightly salted.

Willo happens to eat like he has been starving for days and then asks me a question as he says, “Do you drive back in New York City, Sarina?”

I take a sip of my beer first and answer, “I do drive, but, a piece of junk that is almost ready to break down. I just can’t afford a new or used car right now.”

“I understand, Sarina, maybe you can buy an affordable car here in Crystal City. Once you decide to live here and maybe open your own business.”

“I do hope so, Willo. Anyway, as you were saying about the new cell tower. Are there any cell phones made?”

Willo takes a steak fry and says, “Yes, there is a man who designed our first cell phone and he is going to have his company that he retired from, manufacture a shipment in a few weeks. Everyone here is anxiously waiting for one. I know it is a necessary means of communication in your world.”

Tira takes a bite of her baked potato and then says, “He is from New York City also, Sarina.”

“Nice. Does he own his own company here?” I ask.

Willo looks at Tira and says, “Right now he is still living in New York because he is trying to bring two young knowledgeable people he worked with here. I actually will see him when I open the portal in one week. His last name is Watson and we decided to name the company Watson. You see, Sarina, every other Sunday all the stores close and the owners of each gather together with me. I open the portal so they can replenish their stock from their own country. We all enter as a group to each one.”

My heart beats fast when I hear the name Watson. I take a breath as I look at Willow and say, “Is his first name Henry? And, does he have a daughter that is married?”

Willo seems shocked and says, “Yes, his first name is Henry and from what he told me his daughter is married. His wife passed away a few years ago.”

“Oh my Goodness!” I shout.

“He is my next door neighbor. I actually told him I went to an auction and bought a music box when he invited me over for dinner. I also mentioned how I was experiencing strange pink lights coming from the music box. He seemed to know exactly what was happening.”

Tira looks at me and says, “Sarina, that sure is strange how first you met Pina, the daughter of Anthony Farino and now you know that your next door neighbor has been here and designed our first cell phone.”

“I know. This is just incredible.”

Willo grabs the dessert menu on the table and says, “Anyone interested in dessert?”

He winks at Tira and says, “I have room for a scoop of vanilla ice cream with walnuts on top.”

I look at the menu and say, “I think I can go for one also.”

Tira shouts, “Make that three!”

The waitress comes over and starts to clear our table and says, “Dessert for anyone?”

Willo speaks up first and says, “Yes, all three of us will have a scoop of vanilla ice cream with walnuts as a topping, please.”

The waitress says, “Absolutely, I will be back in a few.” She walks away while pushing a small silver table on wheels with our dishes on top.”

I need to go to the bathroom as I whisper, “Please excuse me as I have to use the restroom.”

Tira says, “No problem, Sarina. It is near the main entrance.”

I quickly get up and go.

I was back in 10 minutes when the waitress arrived with our ice cream. It looks so filling. She hands us each a bowl and says, “Y’all enjoy.”

Willo says, “I will take the check please anytime you are ready.”

She says, “Sure darling, I actually have it all set and in my pocket for you.” She hands Willo the check as he places it in his back pocket as she walks away towards her next table.

All three of us start to take a bite as we quietly enjoy our ice cream.

Tira says, “The ice cream here comes from a farm that is outside the city along with the meat, poultry, pork, butter, milk and eggs. The farmers there will get help from another family soon as they start to increase their vegetables and fruits.”

Wiping my mouth with a napkin first I say,“I happened to see the farm as I was walking by making my way towards Crystal City. It is one of the largest farms I have ever seen.”

Willo is finished with his ice cream and says, “I am going to pay the bill at the register while you ladies finish your ice cream.”

Tira whispers, “Okay sweetie.” Willo gets up and walks to the man at the front desk.

I look at the clock and it is almost 6:45 p.m. as Willo walks back to us and sits down.

I just finished with my ice cream and Tira is almost done with hers as I shout, “Thank you to both of you for a delicious dinner and dessert.”

Willo says, “It is our pleasure to meet and treat you, Sarina.”

Tira wipes her lips and puts on a little lipstick and says, “Exactly, Sarina. Now let’s show you the cell tower and the auto manufacturing plant as we hop on the train next.”

“Sounds good to me!” I shout.

We get up and before we exit the three of us say, “Thank you” to the man at the front desk.

Walking on the same side of the street and only a short distance to the train station, we slowly turned the corner and there it was. I felt my eyes open wide when I saw it. The bullet train was waiting. As we approach it, it is just the most fascinating train. The color is a sparkling silver and there are 7 passenger wagons attached. The front engine part is shaped like a bullet and the window is curved inward. There is a light pink probably about 9 inches wide vertical stripe going down the front part and between two windows. I guess it is because Tira likes the color pink. All the passenger wagon windows are tinted. On the front engine door there is white painted lettering that reads: *The Bullet* with Japanese lettering underneath it. And, of course, the train is hovering about 3 inches above the ground.

“ABSOLUTELY FASCINATING!” I shout. Willow and Tira start to laugh.

Willo grabs Tira’s hand and all three of us wait patiently. When the train begins to slowly drop to the ground the doors begin to open. A voice over a speaker says, “*All Aboard*.” We enter the train and the seats are all black with cushioned padding. I take a seat near a window as Tira and Willow sit opposite me with Tira near the window. Once everyone is seated the doors close. Within a minute, you can feel the train begin to rise up. I look out the window and it is now hovering 3 inches above the ground again.

Tira notices me looking out the window and says, “I magically powered the train so that it can slowly drop to the ground for the passengers to enter and rise up again for departure, Sarina.”

“You are certainly incredible, Tira.”

Willo smiles and winks at Tira as he says, “That she is.”

The train slowly starts to pick up speed. I look out the window and it sure is a beautiful countryside. You can see the farm and church from a distance as the train moves the opposite direction.

Tira looks out the window and says, “We will be approaching the cell tower only if the train doesn’t stop. It will slow down for you and passengers to take a look out the window. The next station stop is the Alfa Auto Mfg. Plant and that is where we will get off along with the passengers. Alfa stands for Abundant Life For All. The workers for the night shift are there for 8 hours. They work 7 with an hour break. There is a cafeteria inside at the back of the building where the employees can get a cooked meal and relax while eating.”

“That sounds like a great place to work. I can’t wait to see it, Tira.”

I kept looking out the window enjoying the view. I even noticed some bluebirds flying by. “*Maybe one of them is the one that was resting on me when I entered here.”* I thought.

Willo leans over Tira to look out the window and says, “There it is, Sarina. Look to your left as the train will slowly go by for you to take a good look at it.”

Looking over the train suddenly begins to slow down and there it is clearly for everyone to see. It is about 100-150 feet high in a triangular shape. It has two huge white discs attached to two sides almost near the top. The top part has a flat silver triangle piece of metal with 8 long rods standing upward.

I am so excited that I turn to Willo and say, “This sure is so exciting to actually see a cell tower. Back in New York City all you can see is old run down buildings.”

Willo looks at me and says, “I didn’t know what one was until I saw your world and heard all about what it can do. Technology is exciting to me, Sarina.”

As we start to pass the cell tower the train begins to pick up speed again. Tira kisses Willo on the cheek and says, “Once you see the Alfa Auto Mfg. Plant you might want to buy a car, Sarina.”

“I wish.”

Within minutes I see a white concrete building with top to bottom glass windows and a huge wide sliding door at the front entrance of the building. I see a sign and it reads: **Alfa Auto Mfg. Plant.** There are 3 cars making their way out of the sliding doors and onto a parking lot in front of the building. The colors are silver, beige, and black meeting about 18 other cars already parked. I count them as I watch them being parked.

The train begins to slow down as we approach the drop off station only a few feet away from the building. Once it stops it slowly drops to the ground as the doors open and we all exit out. Willow and Tira are holding hands as I walk beside them to the sliding doors entrance of the Auto Mfg. Plant.

“Oh my Heavens!” I shout as we enter.

Inside is a big showcase of 4 shiny new cars. There are pictures of car designs on the back wall. The night shift crew are in line clocking in with their thumb print into a machine. Afterwards they go through doors that must lead to the manufacturing area. Willo walks over to a man at a desk and his name tag reads: *Manager* as he talks to him and within 2 minutes walks back to us.

Willo says, “The manager said it’s okay for us to go take a look before he starts the machines for the night crew.”

The three of us walk to the door and go inside. Once inside there is a long line of skeletal looking cars. My eyes glance at each one as we walk slowly down the corridor. I look at the different types of machines that seem to put together the parts of an engine.

“FASCINATING!” I shout.

Tira looks back at me and says, “Well, Sarina, this is fascinating to Willo and I, because, where we came from there are no automobiles.”

Within 15 minutes a soft alarm sounds that alerts all night shift workers to their work stations.

Willo grabs Tira’s hand and says, “Okay, time for us to head back out into the lobby.” We exit out and Willo releases Tira’s hand as he walks over to the manager at the desk. He whispers into his ear and the manager hands Willo something. Willo then walks back to us.

I look at Willo’s hand and it is a set of car keys. Willo turns to me and says, “Sarina, would you like to test drive a car from the parking lot?”

I am nervous and shocked with my eyes bulging out as I shout, “ABSOLUTELY!”

Tira laughs really loud as the three of us walk out to the parking lot where the new cars are. Taking a look around my eyes went straight for a dark blue sporty hatchback that resembles a Hyundai Veloster. The name of it is ALFA Xtreme-S.

I turn to Willo and he takes one of the keys off the keychain and says, “Okay, Sarina, I bet this is the one you would like to try out.”

“Oh Yes!” I shout.

Willo hands me the keys and I unlock the door and hop in. The seat is so comfortable. The fabric is stitched to perfection. I look at the doors first and they have powered windows that my junk car doesn’t have. I turn the key to look at the dashboard and the symbol lights indicator comes on. Looks almost like Lucy’s car, except, there is another indicator light that must be the *sensor* that is installed in the cars. There is a sticker near that area that reads: *Equipped with an advanced Electronic Stability Control. A sensor will activate when an obstacle is in the path.* The heating and cooling section looks like Lucy’s also. There is a computer looking screen and about 6 buttons for a selection that states satellite radio.

My window is halfway down and Willo is looking in as I say,”How does the car get satellite radio from Crystal City?”

Willo puts his hand on the door and says, “Well, even though we are located in another realm, we get the signal from your world’s satellite through the power of the crystals that are on the buildings.”

“FREAKIN UNBELIEVABLE!” I shout.

Tira laughs as she says, “That is a word I never heard.”

Willo removes his hand and says, “Hold on before you start the engine, I am going to the water bottle machine that is located in the lobby.”

“Okay.”

*“I wonder what for?”* I thought

He walks quickly inside while Tira wipes her neck from standing in the hot sun.

Willo comes back within 2 minutes and has 4 water bottles in his hand. He says, “You need a little more gas, Sarina.”

Willo places the 4 bottles of water on the ground and removes the cover on each. He waves his hand over each one and suddenly you begin to smell gas. Willo says, “Release the gas button, Sarina. It is located on the left side near your chair.”

I look down and pull up the button. Willo removes the cap and pours each bottle into the gas tank as I say, “I can sure use you in New York when I go back to work for a while.”

We all start to laugh and Willo says, “Just don’t tell the manager what I did.”

“Not a problem. My lips are sealed.”

“Back at *Crystal City* there are gas stations, Sarina, that I helped out with the owners.”

Willo finishes pouring and closes the gas cap. He says, “You are now ready for a test drive. When you leave the parking lot take a right onto a dirt road and you will see a sign in red lettering that says, “**Test Drive Road Track**”. The track is circular 1 mile long with a 4 feet high wired fence.”

“Okay.”

I start the engine and take off slowly as I drive out of the parking lot and onto the dirt road. I see the sign and make my way into the track.

“Wow.” I whisper.

As I pick up speed it feels like the car is silently moving. Going around I can feel the power of the engine knowing in my mind I truly desire a car like this. I look at the time on the computer screen after driving around for 15 minutes and it is 8:15 p.m. I decided to leave the test drive area and go back to the parking lot to park the car.

Once I open the car door and get out I hand Willo the car key. He says, “What do you think of our cars here?”

“Oh my goodness, AWESOME!” I shout.

Tira puts her arm around Willo and says, “Maybe this car can be destined for you once you come back, Sarina.”

“I sure hope it will.”

My eyes start to water.

Willow and Tira give me a hug as Willo says, “It is time for me to open the portal for you to go back to New York City, Sarina.”

“I wish I didn’t have to. I just want to thank both of you for the most exciting and fantastic day of my life.”

Tira hands me my bag with the sandals and slippers inside along with the music box. She was holding onto it while I took the car for a test drive.

Willo takes out his crystal from his back pocket and places it in his left hand. He waves his right hand over the crystal as it starts to power up glowing and the portal starts to appear.

Tira quickly says, “Sarina, if you ever encounter any sudden complications with Anthony Farino, I have given the crystal in your music box a one time only activation. You can make sure you stop him before any danger happens. Just open your music box without turning the key and say the words: “*Crystal Activate”* and the crystal will power up and zap him as he freezes for at least 5 minutes.

“Sounds *Great!*” I shout.

Before I go through I give Tira and Willo a kiss on the cheek as I hug them both and whisper, “I will be back.”

I enter the portal as I watch Willow and Tira faintly disappear. As I look back tears start rolling down my face.

**Chapter 4**

**The Perfect Design**

I wake up in total darkness as I am back in my apartment. Getting up I walk slowly without bumping into anything as I turn the light on. Everything was exactly how I left it. Dishes are on the counter from my lunch and the air conditioner is on at a low setting. I place my bag with the sandals on my bedroom chair as I take out the slippers to wear. Putting my pajamas on first, my sneakers go in my closet and the music box back on the bookshelf. Into the bathroom I go as I turn the light on and brush my teeth.

“I think I will watch some television as I relax on the couch for the rest of the night. Just like Willo thought I would do.” I whisper.

Grabbing the remote I turn the television on to one of my shows.

As I am lying down I had an idea. “*Maybe I will ask my boss for a vacation day, Friday.”* I thought*.*

It is the only way I can see Eric without Lucy asking any questions.

Time goes by and I have fallen asleep on the couch. Opening my eyes, it’s past 11:00 p.m., as I called it a night.

After a good night’s sleep I awake with a loud sound from my alarm clock. I look out my window and it is a beautiful Thursday morning. I do miss *Crystal City’s* weather because there was absolutely no humidity. I put my slippers on and head into the kitchen to make my breakfast. While I brew the coffee I turn the television on for the news. The newsman announces that another shooting and robbery has taken place.

“Well, that’s nothing new!” I shout.

Taking my vitamins as I begin to eat my cinnamon waffle breakfast the weatherman says, “It is going to be a very hot and humid day today reaching about 98 degrees and to make sure people stay hydrated.”

“I think I will wear my new sandals that Tira bought me. Just hoping that Lucy doesn’t see them and ask me where I got them.” I whisper.

Finishing my breakfast I decided to put the dishes in the dishwasher and go straight into the bathroom to brush my teeth and wash my face. Then, into the shower I know I need to go because of no showering yesterday.

Once I was out of the shower I dressed quickly and let my hair air dry as usual while putting my eye makeup on. Within minutes I am done as I grab my folder with the 3 designs along with my handbag and car keys. I exit out and lock my door.

I look at my car and mumble, “ What a piece of junk.”

I unlock my car door and get in. Starting up my car I roll my windows down and the engine even starts to sound like it could break down soon.

In less than 20 minutes I arrive at work. Looking for a parking space I happen to notice Lucy’s car and park behind hers. As I grab my folder and handbag I make sure my front windows are down just a crack for a little air to come in as it will be very hot when I leave tonight. I exit out and lock my door.

Looking at the time from my cell phone I have enough time to grab a muffin and coffee.

Into the building I go. While I walk to get my coffee and muffin I see Larry in line paying at the register. He then grabs a seat to eat his egg breakfast with his coffee.

Paying at the register he sees me and shouts, “Hey there, Sarina, how are you feeling?” He gives me a slight wink.

“Feeling much better thank you, Larry.”

Larry whispers, “Oh good, you’re welcome to take a seat here and eat.”

Knowing in my mind I didn’t want him to ask me any questions about yesterday, so, I whisper, “Thanks Larry, but, I will see you upstairs. I have to give the boss some cover designs.”

Larry seems a little hurt and whispers, “That’s fine. I’ll see you upstairs.”

I walk out and take the escalator up to the department.

Lucy is at her desk eating a donut and drinking her coffee. I walk quickly so that she doesn’t notice my sandals. I take a seat at my desk as Lucy shouts, “Hey girl, how ya doing? Missed you at lunch yesterday!”

Placing my coffee and muffin on my desk along with my folder I whisper, “Much better, thanks. Lunch today sounds good as I looked at the menu. It is pastrami sandwiches.”

Lucy gives me a thumbs up.

Turning my computer on I look to see if there are any e-mails. And, of course, there are several people interested in opening an account with the company. My boss arrives with a donut and coffee in his hand. He walks over to me and says, “Morning, Sarina, hope you are feeling better?”

“Much better.” I whisper.

If he only knew that I wasn’t in my apartment all day. I was enjoying a beautiful, out of this world, new city.

“I have the 3 cover designs done and ready for you to look at.” I hand him my folder.

Taking the folder he says, “Very good, Sarina, I will let you know by the end of the day, which one ,out of the three I choose.” He walks into his office.

I take a bite of my muffin and I hope he chooses the one with the music box.

Sipping my coffee I reply back to the e-mails setting up appointments for each one. I notice one of the e-mails is of an old woman that I talked to earlier this week on the phone. She kept asking me questions over and over, with a foreign accent, maybe italian. The boss did mention that her son takes good care of her and that she has an account with us.

*It is probably Anthony Farino’s mother.* I thought

While typing I received an email from Lucy asking me what time I would like to go to lunch.

I replied back saying, “How about 12:15 p.m. today? That way there is not a long line.”

Lucy replies, “Sounds good.”

My boss comes out of his office as I just finished taking my last bite of my muffin. I can see he has a written letter in his hand as he walks over to me and says, “Sarina, could you please type this letter and send it to these 3 clients.”

“Of course, I will do that as soon as I am done with the emails.” He places the letter with the 3 client names on my desk.

I took a look at the 3 names and addresses and unbelievably one of them is Anthony Farino and his address is at Prince’s Bay, Staten Island, NY.

“Very interesting about 18 miles away from where I live.” I mumble.

While my boss turns to walk back into his office I call out and say, “Is it possible for me to take a vacation day tomorrow?”

He answers, “That’s fine since you have the 3 cover designs all done.”

“Thank you, sir!” I shout.

I just have to take a drive to see Anthony Farino’s house in Staten Island before I actually go see Eric at his shop.

I finished with the emails, I began typing the letter while merging the names and addresses with it. I do a spell check before I send the letters to print.

Getting up to go to the printer Lucy asks, “Can you please help me with filing? It is about 50 papers to put in alphabetical order. I am so backed up in work this morning, “

“Sure. I have nothing urgent to do after I get my print job.”

Lucy hands me the papers as soon as I come back from the printer. She says, “Thanks so much. I owe you one.”

Before I go back to my desk I give the printed letters to my boss. He says, “Thank you, Sarina. I just want to mention what a fantastic job you did on the 3 cover designs. I have to choose one of them before the end of the day.”

Feeling relieved I whisper, “Thank you, sir.” I walk back to my desk.

At my desk I place the 50 papers into 2 piles to make it easier for me to file. The first pile of names, I list them as A-M. The second pile is N-Z.

The time goes by as I finish and I glance towards the wall clock. It is just about time to go to lunch. Shutting my computer down and grabbing my handbag, I head over to Lucy’s desk and she is ready to go.

We decide to take the elevator down to the sandwich shop and I am so relieved we do. I just don’t want her to suddenly notice my sandals. Once we enter the sandwich shop there are only 4 people in line.

Lucy notices the written menu on the board and says, “Oh wow, the pastrami comes with string fries and coleslaw.”

“Nice. I am hungry just from the smell of the pastrami, Lucy.”

After we order and get our food, we grab a drink and pay at the register. I look over at the tables and there’s a bunch of empty ones near a window. We head over and grab one as we place our trays on the table and sit down. Putting our handbags on a chair, we each start to unwrap our pastrami sandwiches and look inside the bun.

I take a bite and whisper, “This doesn’t have any fat on it..”

Lucy takes a bite and whispers, “I absolutely agree.”

While eating I start thinking about *Crystal City’s* hamburger that I ate yesterday and how fresh the hamburger meat was. I just know I can’t say a word to Lucy yet about my exciting and magical adventure. She probably will think I had some kind of hallucination as I was sick.

After Lucy takes a sip of her drink she asks, “What caused you to be so sick yesterday, Sarina?”

I look up at her and take a sip of my drink real quick and say, “Oh, while I was designing one of the covers I got dizzy, as my eyes were moving left to right quickly.”

“Wow, sort of like Vertigo, Sarina.”

I didn’t like lying to her and there was no way I could tell her the truth. So, I whisper, “Yes, exactly like that.”

We continue eating and enjoying our pastrami sandwich along with the string fries and coleslaw. After about 10 minutes Lucy says, “I overheard you asking the boss for a vacation day tomorrow.”

“Yes I did. I have to do a few errands and the boss did say I could take one.”

“Well, you did work hard on the cover designs. What about this weekend for us to go see Eric at his antique shop?”

The minute I finish chewing I whisper, “We can both go another day. I just need to go by myself this time.”

Lucy doesn’t seem to be hurt and says, “That is fine. He might want to talk to you alone.” She gives me a smile thinking I must be in love.

We both finished eating as we cleaned up our trash. Grabbing our handbags and placing the trays next to the trash area Lucy says, “I would like to buy some mints that are at the register.”

“No problem, I can go for some sugarfree gum.”

We pay at the register as I look at my cell phone and it is time to go back.

Lucy sees me checking my cell phone and says, “I know it is time for us to head back upstairs.”

Going up the escalator and into the department Larry was not at his desk. He probably decided to go to lunch with his buddy from the Human Resource Department.

Lucy notices the department being empty and says, “Looks like everyone went to lunch at the same time.”

“That’s good I kind of like it being quiet for a while, Lucy.” We both go to our desks and sit down.

I place my handbag inside my desk and turn my computer back on. My boss comes out of his office and says, “I will be going to lunch and afterwards to a short meeting. When I come back this afternoon I will announce the design that I have chosen.”

“Okay!” I shout.

He takes the elevator down as I start to feel a little nervous wondering which one he will decide with.

At around 2 p.m. Larry comes back from lunch later than the rest of the department. I e-mail Lucy saying, “This time Larry is late coming back from lunch. Only don’t look at him because he might give you a nasty look back.”

Lucy replies back saying, “I know, I won’t look at him because he might give me a *mind your business big-eyed look*.”

I answered a few voice-mail messages first before I replied to some emails.

Once I called the customers and answered their questions, I had to go to the ladies room. On my way out I walk by my boss’s office and I would like to sneak in to see what design he chose, but I just can’t seem to do it. So, back to my desk I go.

Time passes by as it is almost 4:30 p.m.. Suddenly my boss walks into the department. He walks to his desk and sits down for 15 minutes and then comes back out with one of the designs. He shouts, “May I have everyone’s attention, please!”

Everyone stops working and turns their head towards him. He slowly flips the design over and holds it up over his forehead and shouts, “This is Sarina’s cover design that she created for the company’s new magazine!”

I look up and I am so excited that he decided on the music box design.

“Awesome!” I shout.

Everyone starts to clap as I stand up and take a bow.

I sit back down and my boss shouts, “Congratulations, Sarina, for a job well done!”

“Thank you, sir!” I shout.

He walks back into his office as I begin to shut down my computer for the night. I grab my handbag and walk by Larry’s desk as he winks and says, “Great job on that design. You have a real talent for creativity.”

I had to give him a smile and say, “Thanks, Larry. It is actually what I went to college for.”

He starts to clean up his desk for the night and says, “Have a good night, Sarina.”

“You as well, Larry.” I whisper.

I walk over to Lucy’s desk and she says, “I am staying about 10 -15 minutes to finish up some work. Let me know how things go for you at Eric’s shop tomorrow.”

“Sure, I will send a text.” I take the elevator down and exit the building.

Traffic was a little busy, but, the minute I was home I grabbed my mail and headed into my apartment. Unlocking my door and entering, I turned the air conditioner up a notch. Going into my bedroom I place my handbag on my bureau and slip off my sandals.

Putting on my pajamas early, I knew I wasn’t going out again. I have a load of laundry to do after dinner.

Turning the television on, I go into the kitchen to start my dinner.

“I can go for a cheese omelet with potatoes and garlic bread.” I whisper.

Taking out a roll from the fridge I slice it in half. I chop up garlic and place the pieces on top of each slice. Adding a little salt and pepper, into the oven it goes at 350 degrees.

While setting the table I begin to chop up a potato and mix together 2 eggs with a little grated cheese. Waiting about 5 minutes I start to fry my omelet.

I start to think about how I should approach Farino’s house tomorrow. I just don’t want him around when I do.

When my garlic bread is done and omelet ready I sit down at the table as I silently eat. I think about what I should do tomorrow.

*First, I will drive to Farino’s house in Staten Island and park in a secluded area. Second, I will secretly snap pictures around the home trying to see if there are any clues of criminal involvement. Third, I will drive to Eric’s shop while I check out his place. When there are no customers around I must talk to him about his music box and explain what it can do. Fourth, I will warn him that there will be a man seeking his music box that also was at the auction.*

“I just hope he still has the music box.” I mumble.

I wash the dishes and grab my laundry. I place the clothes in my washer near my dryer in a small room beside the bathroom.

Walking into the living room I decide to watch my shows as I wait for the laundry to finish. Soon after I need to get a good night’s sleep for a nervous long trip tomorrow.

**Chapter 5**

**The Secret Hide-Out**

Friday morning is here and I got up only one time to go to the bathroom. I was so exhausted from being at Crystal City on Wednesday and then getting up Thursday to go to work.

Slipping slippers on while getting my bathrobe I do need to go quickly before breakfast. I walk out into the living room to check on the air conditioner. Passing my music box I remembered what Tira said to me, in case of any danger. Therefore, I will bring my music box with me today.

Into the kitchen I go to make a big breakfast. Deciding with pancakes this morning I took out the pancake mix from the cabinet. Adding an egg and some milk in a bowl I also start to prepare some coffee.

I want my radio on instead of the television, that way, I can concentrate on making perfect pancakes without any distraction watching any program.

The coffee starts to brew as I make the pancakes and the smell is making me very hungry. As soon as I finish eating my breakfast I’ll wash the dishes by hand. Afterwards I will make my bed and brush my teeth. I feel like taking a refreshing bath before my long journey.

Twenty minutes go by and I am done eating as I wash the dishes and put the remainder of the coffee in a mug for tonight. After my bed was made I head into the bathroom to brush my teeth with a whitening toothpaste as I begin to slowly fill the tub.

The minute the tub was filled I grabbed a fizz ball and placed it near my shampoo and conditioner. Getting in the tub I throw in the fizz ball and watch it fizz into a light blue color. The scent is *ocean mist*. Relaxing for a few minutes I shampoo my hair. I use a 5 minute conditioner to soften my hair, which I do once a week.

Fifteen minutes later I was done and the water in the bath drained. Walking into my bedroom I look for an outfit to wear in my closet.

“I want to look nice to see Eric, but also be comfortable for a hot summer day.” I whisper.

I look at my shorts and pick out a beige above the knee hip hugger pair with a black short-sleeve button-down shirt. And, of course, I will wear my new sneakers that Tira bought me. I place my clothes on the bed while I put on facial lotion, eye makeup and some sunblock on my legs and arms.

Within a few minutes I got dressed and felt just a little bit nervous to go to Staten Island. I know I have to see for myself if Anthony Farino is truly a criminal hiding something very interesting at his home.

I grab my socks and sneakers as I place my sunglasses, cell phone, lip gloss, wallet, and car keys in the tote bag that I bought for 99 cents.

Walking into the living room, I put my socks and sneakers on and decided to meditate for only 5 minutes to calm down my nerves.

When I was done meditating I grabbed my music box from the book shelf. Gently it is placed inside my tote bag.

“Now, I am ready to leave!” I shout.

I exit out of my apartment and lock the door as I walk to my car. Once outside and into my car I roll down the windows as I take out my cell phone. I look for google maps and enter Farino’s address. Placing the cell phone in the cup holder area with the cell phone attachment I start the car and depart for my destination.

While driving I can feel a cool breeze on my face. The volume on my cell phone is on high so I can listen to directions without looking at my phone.

“Just hope my car doesn’t give me any problems today.” I mumble.

Google maps is stating, *take I-278W to Staten Island*. As I get on the highway a bird decides to shit on my windshield. Spraying a little wiper fluid my blades start making a scratching noise.

“I hope to buy a new car in Crystal City!“ I shout.

Time goes by after driving 9 miles. I need to fill up my tank and use the restroom.

I take the next exit and go straight to the gas station. Filling up my car first I, then, slowly drive towards the side of the gas station to where the restroom is and park. Rolling up my windows and locking the car I go in and use the restroom.

Five minutes later I am out and into my car as I roll down my windows again and start the engine. Before I take off, I put my sunglasses on. I don’t want to get blinded by the sun’s late morning rays and cause a major car accident. Once I depart google maps tells me to take the exit on my right to go back onto the highway.

Back on the highway there is not much traffic and it is almost noon and the day is getting much hotter. Hopefully, I won’t sweat by the time I arrive at Prince’s Bay.

Starting to feel a little thirsty after a few more miles I just can’t allow myself to stop to buy a drink. I’ll have to use the restroom over and over.

Finally there is a sign coming up that reads: Prince’s Bay, Staten Island 2 miles. “Okay I am almost there!” I shout.

Feeling a bit excited I begin to sing quietly while still listening to directions on google maps.

As I approach the next mile there is a lady changing a flat tire on the breakdown lane.

“Yikes!’ I shout.

I feel bad for her and I sure hope I don’t have to deal with that any time soon.

Google Maps is now stating, *1 mile to your destination and take the next exit*.

I begin to move to my first lane to take the exit. I notice how beautiful it really is, although my heart is for Crystal City. At a distance I can see the Prince’s Bay lighthouse. From Google’s site it is situated on an 85 foot high steep bank.

The minute I take the exit I have to pay attention to Farnio’s street address in Prince’s Bay. I decide to drive slowly while listening to google maps tell me to take the next street and then onto Canterbury Ave.

Entering Anthony Farino’s street google maps is stating, *in 100 feet is your destination.*

I begin to slow down and look carefully to my right. I noticed a Colonial style white vinyl siding house. It has tan brick stones on the front part of the house. The main entrance door is white with a long oval shaped window. There’s Awnings that are tan striped above the front windows of the house only. And, a small section of the roof has solar panels.

“Very nice house.” I whisper.

I decide to park a few feet away as I pretend to answer my cell phone. All of a sudden, a man in a dark suit walks out wearing sunglasses beginning to smoke a cigarette. He leans against the side of the house to take a few puffs. It is absolutely not Farino. Probably a friend or bodyguard. I continue to pretend that I am talking on my cell phone. The man smoking sees me and quickly puts out his cigarette as he walks back into the house.

I kind of panic and shout, “Oh Shit!”

Starting up my car and pulling out of the parking space I drive down the street and park. Looking through my rearview mirror two men come out of the house. One is the man that was smoking and the other one is Farino. The man that was smoking probably told him a suspicious stranger was parked nearby.

They can’t see me as they both go back inside. As I sit in my car I feel like chewing a piece of gum to relax my nerves.

I forgot I left the pack of gum in my car from yesterday and it didn’t even seem to melt.

Suddenly, Farino and that man walk out as he locks his front door. I see them enter a black sedan parked in his driveway. Farino starts the car and backs out. He turns the other direction on the street, hopefully heading towards the highway.

“Nice.” I whisper.

An idea popped into my head. I open the glove compartment and find the black baseball cap that Henry gave me. It says, “*Techcom*” on the front of the cap in white lettering. It is the company he worked for. I also take out a pen and a little notebook that I usually keep in case of a car accident.

Closing the glove compartment I grab my cell phone and leave my tote bag resting on the passenger seat. I now will pretend to be a salesperson working for *Techcom* going around the neighborhood. I put on the baseball cap.

I feel calm as I carefully get out of my car and lock the door. Placing my keys in one pocket of my shorts and my cell phone in the other, I begin to go door to door until reaching Farino’s house. I’ll skip a few houses in case he decides to come back too early.

Quickly walking to my first house I ring the doorbell. I hear someone walking and a cute old lady opens the door and says, “Hello darling, can I help you?”

She is so cute as I whisper, “Hi there. I am from *Techcom* and just would like to offer you a triple play, which is, a cable tv, internet and wireless phone bundle.”

She smiles and says, “Sorry honey, but I already purchased a new service with someone else 2 months ago.”

“Oh, that’s fine. I am sure you have a 2 year contract.”

“I do honey. Thanks for stopping by and good luck.”

I smile and say, “Thank you.”

She closes the door as I move on to the next house.

“Hope no one actually decides to purchase anything from me or I will be in trouble.” I whisper.

I ring the doorbell as I wait for someone to answer. I hear someone talking and a young woman opens the door and says, “Can I help you?”

I smile and say, “Hello. I am in the neighborhood and would like to offer you a triple play, which is, a cable tv, internet and wireless phone bundle.”

She snaps at me and says, “I am all set and absolutely not interested.” She slams the door at my face.

As I walk down her stairs I mumble, “What a f ….bitch.”

After that incident I skipped a few houses and went to the house before Farino’s and rang the doorbell. The door opens and a young boy is at the door with a backpack. He looks like a college kid.

He smiles and says, “Hi, can I help you?”

I smile as I say,” I am going around the neighborhood and would like to offer you a cable tv, internet and wireless phone bundle.”

He says, “No thanks. My family has been with another company for a very long time.”

He checks me out with a smile and says, “By the way, I would love to take you out.

“That’s nice of you, but I already have a boyfriend.”

I had to think of something quick to say.

He seemed angry as he closed the door behind him. He starts to walk the other way down the street as he places a baseball in his backpack.

“Oh boy.” I mumble.

I finally begin to walk inching closer to Farino’s house as my heart nervously starts pounding. I take a deep breath to calm my nerves while walking up his red brick front steps. I ring the doorbell.

I wait for about 2 minutes and ring the bell again while watching the time on my cell phone. No one answers and I feel relieved that no other person is home. Afterwards, I sneak around the back of the house and try to look into the first floor window. I can see Farnino’s huge living room area and it sure seems like he has very expensive taste in furniture.

I carefully try to see other rooms through the window and there doesn’t seem to be anything unusual. I walk to the next window and my foot happens to get stuck on something in the grass. Looking down I notice a square patch of grass that is probably 5 X 5 feet in diameter that looks darker than the rest of the grass. My right foot is inside a small circular metal handle.

“Wow.” I whisper.

“I wonder what this is.” I whisper again.

I take my foot out and pull on the handle. All of a sudden, that 5 X 5 square patch of grass turns out to be a metal door with grass attached to the top. I lift it up and notice cement stairs leading underground.

“Holy shit, I have to see what is down there.” I whisper.

I begin to go down the stairs with the flashlight from my cell phone turned on. As I approach the bottom of the stairs I see a huge red battery operated lantern resting on the floor. I turned it on and shut off my cell phone flashlight. I am in a finished room with a sofa on one side and a recliner beside it. I could not believe what my eyes saw next. Resting on two tables, as I count them in my head, are in total 90 automatic firearms. They look like machine guns and short-barreled shotguns. I look around the room and across from the tables near a wall are paintings. I move closer to them. The minute I saw them I knew they were stolen paintings from the New York museum. I snap pictures of the paintings and also pictures of the automatic firearms making sure the pictures are clear enough before I quickly run up the stairs and shut the 5 X 5 metal door.

“Oh boy this is interesting and what the hell are you up to Farino?” I whisper.

I sneak around the side of the house again with my baseball cap covering my forehead. I ran back to my car without anyone noticing.

Getting into my car I start the engine and take off as fast as I can heading back onto the highway.

“That sure was exciting and worth the drive!” I shout.

As I’m driving I suddenly panic and shout, “ Shit, I forgot to shut off the lantern!”

Hopefully Farino will think he left the lantern on himself.

*“*I wonder if Pina and her mother know about his secret hideout*. “*  I whisper.

Feeling a bit hungry I took the next exit to get a muffin and ice coffee at the Mobil Mart gas station. Once I paid I saw a picnic table outside and decided to sit down and eat while sipping a vanilla flavored ice coffee.

The minute I finished eating I needed to use the restroom before I filled up my tank again.

Within 20 minutes I was back on the highway and about 7 miles from New York City. I turned my radio on a little louder as I listened to country music while trying not to worry about the lantern.

**Chapter Six**

**Eric’s Shop**

Soon I was back in New York City and a bit relieved after sneaking around Farino’s neighborhood. Being only minutes away from Eric’s shop I just can’t wait to see him and check out his antique store. There is so much I have to tell him especially about his music box, only, hoping he still has it.

Arriving at a parking lot I found a spot right up front. Shutting my car off I look at my rearview mirror and put on some lip gloss as I try to scrunch my hair up a bit. Rolling my windows up I grab my tote bag and exit my car as I quickly lock it. I begin to calmly walk to the entrance. There are some antique chairs outside near the door and a big sidewalk sign that reads: 25% off sale Friday - Sunday.

Opening the door and walking in, about 10 customers are checking out furniture. Another 5 customers are in line as Eric sees me and gives me a wink.  *“I sure like him winking at me and not the idiot Larry.”* I thought.

He looks sexy and cool for a hot day. He’s wearing gray knee length shorts and a dark blue short sleeve button down shirt. I wave and smile as I begin to look around. There are lamp shades on one table with different size stands that seem to be sold separately. Walking along slowly there are 4 night stands and one caught my eye. It is a 19th Century French Night Stand that is light blue in color and the price is $250. “ So beautiful.” I whisper.

Eric notices me walking around as a few more customers wait in line. I then walk over to a chair that says it is a 19th Century Captain’s Chair and the price is S1,050. “Holy Moly!” I shout.

A lady hears me and laughs as I continue to walk over to a shelf. On the shelf are 3 rows of knick knacks. Some are miniature copper tea kettles and pasta makers that are so cute. Other miniatures are ceramic vases and metal antique sewing machines. The price tags range between $5 to $40. “I think I will buy two $20 ones.” I whisper.

I grab one of the miniature copper tea kettles and one miniature metal sewing machine for my mother as she has a collection.

Holding on to the knick knacks I walk over to a glass locked up case next. It is about 5 feet tall and 3 feet wide. As I look through it there are many different kinds of music boxes. “Okay!” I shout.

Checking them out one by one, I finally saw the one that I was hoping Eric still had. Feeling relieved as now I pray no one decides to purchase it.

Looking around to see where Eric was, he was still at the register. There was only 1 customer in line while several others walked out with piles of merchandise.

I decide to walk over to the register because there is only a man in line and to say “Hi” to Eric. As the man turns around to leave Eric looks happy to see me. He smiles with these sparkly white teeth and says, “Hello Sarina, What brings you in on a Friday?”

I was happy he remembered my name as I placed the knick knacks on the counter.

I smile and say, “I took a vacation day today to come check out your place and to actually talk to you in private about something.”

In his British accent he says, “I’m happy to see you again and in about 5 minutes my dad will be relieving me for a late lunch. There is a pizza place across the street and we can sit outside while we chat and eat.”

“Absolutely!” I shout.

Ringing up my knick knacks he takes out some see thru flowery paper and wraps them up nice and tight. All of a sudden, a man walks up to Eric and says, “Hello, son.”

Eric looks at me and says, “Sarina, this is my dad and dad this is a young lady I met at the auction on Saturday.”

His dad, in a British accent says, “Nice to meet you, Sarina.”

I smile and say, “A pleasure to meet you .”

Eric hands me the knick knacks he wrapped and places them into a small paper bag with handles as I pay him. Before we leave the register Eric opens a draw beside the register and takes out a black wallet. His dad then places his wallet in the same draw as Eric combs back his slick hair with his fingers.

His dad shouts, “Okay you two enjoy lunch!”

I felt so in love as we walked side by side. We both exit out his shop as I carry my tote and knick knack bag. While waiting for the traffic light to change Eric says, “Do you like cheese with black olives on your pizza?”

“Oh yes!” I shout.

The traffic light changed as we both walked to the entrance of the pizza place. Once inside and at the counter Eric says, “I like to order a large crispy cheese pizza with a topping of black olives.”

The man at the counter says, “What drinks do you like with your pizza?”

Eric looks at me and says, “Sarina, what would you like?”

I smile at him and say, “I will have a small glass of white wine, please.”

“Of course!” Eric shouts.

He orders a tall Bud light for himself as he takes out his black wallet and pays.

The man says, “It will be about 15 minutes and if you like you can grab a table outside or wait in here.”

Eric says, “Thanks, we will certainly grab a table outside.”

Eric walks over to a table near the entrance door. We both sit down on cushioned metal chairs.

Within minutes a waitress brings out our drinks as Eric says, “Thank you.”

Eric looks at me and says, “Well, what was it that you wanted to talk to me about in private?”

“Oh yes.” I whisper.

“It’s about the three music boxes that you and I, along with another person, purchased at the auction.”

Eric takes a sip of his beer first and whispers, “I’m listening.”

I take a sip of my wine first and I love the dry taste of it as I say, “Two of the music boxes contain a crystal and the other one does not. I will get to the one that doesn’t in a few minutes. My music box and yours have crystals that have a unique power. At first, I thought I was hallucinating when I saw pink flowing lights and also a humming noise coming from mine. After a few days I decided to turn the key which activated a music tone. Once activated a portal opened up right before my eyes. I stepped into it and I fainted. When I awoke I was in another place or another realm.”

Eric looks at me and says, “Are you telling me that the music box takes you to a magical place.”

I take another sip of my wine and shout, “Yes, exactly.!”

“Don’t think I am crazy.” I whisper.

The waitress suddenly comes out with the pizza as we both Shout, “Thank you!”

Eric takes out sanitizer spray and sprays his hands near the side of the table and whispers, “Would you like me to spray your hands.”

“Of course.” I whisper.

He gently sprays my hands as he says, “I didn’t have time to wash my hands at my shop and harmful bacteria is always on your hands.”

We both grab a slice of pizza and take a bite. It sure is perfectly crunchy. After 2 minutes I whisper, “I hope you don’t think I am a psychopath about what I am telling you.”

Eric takes another bite and then says, “I would never think that of you. I would like to see for myself this magical place.”

I place another slice of pizza on my plate and whisper,, “That is exactly what I would like you to see. People there are from the U.S. states along with many other countries. They came there with the music boxes being left for auction at many locations throughout the World. And, the person who leaves the music boxes is an actual fairy from his own land. He has a wife who is also a fairy. They each have their own unique powers. A king banished the two of them into a no-where land for the reason of not obeying evil orders. Until one day the male fairy created this magical place transforming rocks into clear crystals. The buildings are all made of these crystals. It is awesome to see all these buildings in a beautiful city called *Crystal City*.”

Eric takes 2 more slices of pizza and says, “All right then, I will use the music box that is in my glass case and go with you to Crystal City.”

I take a few sips of my wine as I wipe my mouth and say, “Hold on, place your music box away in a safer place and we can enter with mine. You see, a man that was at the auction on Saturday is after another one. His music box is the one that doesn’t have a crystal and he knows that Crystal City exists because his wife and daughter are already there. He is always on the news under suspicion of criminal activity.”

As I finished my wine I just didn’t want to tell Eric about where I was today and what I happened to see at Farino’s . He might think I am some kind of lunatic stalker.

Eric finished his beer and is almost done eating as he says, “Would you like another slice of pizza?”

There are 2 pieces left as I ask, “Why don’t you bring them to your dad?”

Eric seems ready to leave as he says, “That sounds like a good idea. He is probably hungry also.”

We both get up from our seats as I watch Eric wrap the pizza in a paper towel that came with the napkins. As we approach the sidewalk to crossover to his shop, Eric gently grabs my hand. When I felt his touch I knew I was deeply in love.

The traffic light changed as we walked across the street. Once we arrive at the entrance of his shop Eric lets go of my hand to open the door.

I enter first as Eric waits to close the door. There are lots of customers purchasing items at the register. Eric says, “Excuse me, Sarina, while I assist my dad at the register I need to bring the line down.”

I smile as I say, “No worries, I will still be here roaming around.”

Eric places his dad’s slices of pizza on the counter behind the registers. I decide to go over to the glass case one more time, where all his music boxes are. There is a man looking at them as I only see his back staring at them.

The minute I approached the man he turned to me and I couldn’t believe who it was. Right beside me was, the one and only, Farino.

Farino gives me an evil laugh and says, “Well, well, who do we have here ready to look at the same thing.”

*I hope he doesn’t know I was in his backyard and in his underground secret hideout as I snapped pictures.*  I thought.

I nervously look at him and say, “Are you interested in purchasing another music box?”

He points to the one from the auction and says, “That one.”

I know he is going to ask Eric for the music box. I look over to Eric to see if he is all set at the register. There are a few customers left., since it is late in the afternoon. Eric notices me looking and he sees Farino suddenly waving his hand to come over to the glass case.

While we wait for Eric, I face Farino as I say, “You know what the music box does and where it brings you. Don’t you?”

He gives me another evil laugh and says, “I sure do and my music box doesn’t have the power that the other two have. I must purchase it and I will pay a good price for it.”

I shout, “No, it is already taken!”

Farino laughs again and says, “That’s nonsense. It is still in the glass case.”

I felt a tap on my shoulder as I turned. It is Eric and he says, “What is all the commotion about?”

I was worried Eric might kick us both out of his shop as I say, “I’m sorry Eric, but this is the other man that purchased one of the music boxes, his name is Anthony Farino. He wants to purchase the one that is in your glass case. I shouted “NO” at him.

Eric gently puts his hand on my shoulder as he says, “She is correct the answer is “NO”. I decided to keep it for myself.”

Farino faces Eric as he whispers, “I’m sure the young lady told you about the power of the crystal inside the music box.”

Eric removes his hand from my shoulder and whispers, “Yes, she did and in fact told me all about it an hour ago.”

Farino is getting angry and I see him slowly grabbing something from inside his socks.

I was nervous and thank God there was only a customer left roaming around. I knew what I had to do. I slowly take out my music box from my tote. I want to be ready to zap Farino in case of sudden trouble. I just didn’t expect him to go out looking for the other music box so soon.

I hear Eric’s dad shout, “ WATCH OUT!”

Eric and I notice a small black handgun as Farino pulls it out of his black sock. Farino holds it in front of us and says, “I would like the music box now and I don’t want to cause any more trouble.”

I panic as I have my music box in my hand. I open it and begin to shout the words, “Crystal Activate”.

My hands were literally trembling as the music box illuminated a golden blast of light, it missed hitting Farino as I shouted, “Oh Shit!”

Farino quickly grabs my music box from my hand. He knew what to do as he turned the key to activate the music tone. As I took a deep breath the portal appeared. The three of us were directly upon it as I pushed all of us inside the opening.

*Farino wasn’t going to enter the city without me and Eric*. I thought

All of a sudden, inside the portal I watch Farino and Eric collapse. Within seconds I myself felt faint as I collapsed.

**Chapter Seven**

**The Unexpected Return**

I slowly start to move and as I wake up, I find myself near the church and about 3 feet away from the colorful statue of St. Michael. Looking around I see Farino and Eric on their backs still asleep. “There must be some kind of air inside the portal that triggers the fainting spell.” I whisper.

I decided to inch closer to Farino very carefully. I want to grab his weapon, which is lying on the ground beside him. I am only inches away from him as he suddenly awakens. He grabs my right ankle with his left hand and his gun with his right. I scream so loud hoping Eric wakes up.

Eric begins to move and sees us as he nervously stands up on his feet quickly.

Farino says, “Hold it right there young man. One step further and I will have to put a bullet in her leg.” Eric carefully backs away.

Farino slowly lets go of my ankle. He stands up pointing his gun at both of us.

Eric walks over to me and whispers, “I have your music box.” Eric shows me with his eyes where he placed it. I look with my eyes moving slowly as it is in his left pant pocket.

Farino shouts, “Enough whispering and start walking. We are headed to that city you can see straight ahead about one mile from where we are.”

Eric looks at me and says, “I wanted to see this magical city, but didn’t expect to have a black shiny weapon pointed at me while going there.”

Farino laughs and says, “Be quiet and keep moving.”

We continue to walk as we pass the area where the beautiful flowers are. Farino glances at the flowers and says, “This place where we are, seems like a beautiful and peaceful place to live.”

I look at Farino as I laugh and say, “If the two creators of this place know you entered flashing a weapon around, you will be surprised at what they can do.”

Farino gives me a laugh and says, “Is that right? I know there are no weapons here because I overheard my daughter whispering to my wife. So, I truly wonder what they can do.”

Eric looks at me and whispers, “Don’t say a word about who they are and what they are capable of doing.”

I give Eric a smile and whisper, “I hope he finds out by one sudden mistake.”!

The bullet train is moving from a distance as Eric shouts, “Holy Moly!”

He looks at me and says, “That train looks like it is hovering inches above ground without train tracks.”

I happen to see how excited Eric got and say, “It is and you will see exactly how magical this city actually is.”

Farino notices and says, “Hmm…... that sure can come in handy.”

We continue inching closer to the city as I get Farino’s attention and say, “How did you know about Eric’s shop and that he placed his music box there?”

Farino answers back and says, “Very good question. I noticed him from a commercial and that he was the owner of an Antique shop. So, I figured that maybe he had the music box there. I had to take care of some business this morning and decided to drive to the shop to see for myself. And, of course, I was right.”

While we are walking I notice the blue birds flying around. There are 4 coming towards us. One of them starts to circle around me as the other three fly above. It must be the one that was resting on me when I arrived the first time. I look at it and shout, “Hello!”

Farino thinks it’s funny and shouts, “Oh my, you found yourself a love bird!”

“Be quiet!” I shout.

I look at Eric and he is focused and staring straight ahead as he shouts, “Holy shit those buildings are beautiful. They illuminate as the sun shines on them.”

Farino notices also and says, “The minute we enter that city you two better keep quiet.” He pulls out a handkerchief from his back pocket and places it over his handgun. Eric and I walk a little faster as Farino also picks up his pace.

We are about to enter the city as I notice how excited Eric’s face gets. He shouts, “Those traffic lights are hovering in mid air without any wires or poles!”

I shout back, “Welcome to *Crystal City, Eric*!”

It is busy with traffic as Farino says, “I sure like those automobiles and I can use one of them now after walking quite a distance.”

I turn to him and say, “Well they are not free. You have to buy one.”

Eric laughs at him.

Farino shouts, “SHUT UP!”

We walk right up to one of the trees on the sidewalk as Farino suddenly pokes me with his gun and says, “Now that we are here take me to where my wife and daughter are.”

All of a sudden, I see the lady that I met with her baby. She says, “Hi there again. How are you?”

I say, “Hello.” She notices Farino poke me and must wonder what it is he is carrying covered up and begins to walk very quickly pushing the baby carriage.

I feel thirsty as I whisper, “I need something to drink like very cold water or even ice coffee.”

Eric says, “Yes, I need a cold drink too after walking the distance to get here.”

Farino whispers, “Okay young lady, how do I purchase drinks in this city?”

I whisper back, “You have to go to the bank and open an account. The bank here accepts all currencies and they give each person a bank card that looks exactly like a debit card with your own thumb print on it.”

Farino laughs and says, “Do you literally think I am stupid enough to go into a bank with you two holding a handgun.”

I see Eric look around and he says, “Look over near that hospital I see a person taking a sip of water at the small fountain against the building.”

I look and the hospital is very close to *Ital Mode* shoe store where Farino’s wife works. Only Farino doesn’t know his wife works there.

Farino sees the fountain and says, “Very well let us walk fast to take a drink and no funny business.”

As we walk I happen to notice a new store that wasn’t there before. It is called *The Home Connection.* It looks like a furniture store and I can’t believe who is standing in front of the entrance facing the door. It’s Willow and I hope he turns around to see me walking across the street. But, he seems to be focused on setting up some chairs beside the door.

We are only feet away from the hospital where the drinking fountain is and we have to cross the street. As we wait for the traffic light to change, Farino says, “We can surely use those floating traffic lights back in New York City, even though the colors are very strange here.”

The light changed and we crossed the street and Eric turned to me as he said, “Take your drink first and then we will.”

Farino pokes me with the handgun and whispers, “Just remember I am right behind you.”

I am so thirsty that at the fountain I take sip after sip. The water was ice cold.

Eric goes to the fountain next as I feel Farino’s handgun poking my spine. As soon as he was done I shouted, “Okay Farino you’re next.”

Farino laughs and says, “Oh yes. Let me get rid of my handgun first.”

He whispers, “Do you think I am that dumb as you two watch me drink from the fountain. I have a small tin flask I often carry with me because I am prediabetic.”

He hands the flask to Eric and says, “Go on and fill that to the top.”

Eric fills it and then hands it to Farino as he drinks while poking me sharper.

I shout, “That is enough before you damage my spine.”

Farino notices me staring at the *Ital Mode* store about 20 feet away and says, “Let me guess that is where my wife and daughter are.”

I turn to him and say, “Maybe. Your daughter goes to college here and helps out her mother after classes.”

All three of us begin to walk to *Ital Mode* as I whisper, “When we are inside the shoe store, be careful of the kids hanging around, please.”

My heart is beating fast as I am getting nervous entering the store thinking if Pina is there she might get so scared and start to panic.

We are at the entrance door and Farino whispers, “Just don’t stand there, open the door.”

I open the door and I notice a few customers looking around with only 2 children inside. Two customers in line are at the register. I look around to see if Tira is there and she is not. As we walk by some sneakers I look to see if Pina or her mother are around and they are not.

Farino says, “Okay young lady, where are they?”

I turn to him and say, “Hold on, I will ask someone.”

I happen to see a lady with keys around her neck and I shout, “Excuse me, do you know where the owner of the store is?”

“Yes, she went to the Auto Manufacturing Plant to buy a car for her daughter and Tira went with them, since there isn’t an auto dealer set up in the city at the moment. She left me in charge to lock up the store for later tonight.”

“Okay, thank you.”

Eric seems relieved as I look at him and he says, “Thank God they are not in here.”

Farino says, “That’s fine and how do we go to this Auto Manufacturing Plant without a car?”

As we begin to exit *Ital Mode* I whisper, “Be nice to us and I will bring you there. We have to hop on a train that you saw before we entered *Crystal City.*”

Eric whispers, “I need to use the restroom first.”

Farino whispers, “I bet you also, young lady.”

“In fact I do.”

We start walking to the nearest restaurant as Farino says, “I will go in with you two.”

I turn to Farino and say, “Excuse me you can’t go into the ladies room.”

Farino laughs and says, “I know that. You are sneaking into the mens room with me right behind. I will make sure no one is inside and don’t worry I won’t look.”

We walk near a sandwich shop and Farino says, “Okay, I think this is a good place to use a restroom.”

As we enter the sandwich shop the men’s restroom is right by the entrance door. Farino says, “Eric, open the door. I will look behind you to see if anyone is there.”

I felt so embarrassed going in. No one was around to see us.

Farino says, “Let’s make it fast.”

Eric goes in one stall and I go in another as Farino is right behind our doors. I can hear Eric doing his duty and I am sure he can hear me doing mine.

We then exit our stall and wash our hands. I was embarrassed and relieved no one was there.

Farino says, “Okay one of you open the door so we can get out of here.”

Eric opens the door and we quickly exit the sandwich shop.

Once outside we continue walking towards the train station. People walking by, nod their heads as saying Hi to me. I smile and say, “Hi.”

I hear Farino whisper, “ Good girl just say Hi and keep walking.”

Eric moves closer beside me and whispers, “I hope we will be okay inside the train.”

“I hope.” I whisper back.

We are about to turn the corner and Eric shouts, “Oh my goodness there she is. What a beauty!”

“I know she sure is.”

Farino notices also and says, “Holy shit, I never seen a train so shiny in my entire life and without any train tracks.”

There are about 20 people waiting on a platform as we walk up and stand several feet away from them. Within 2 minutes the train starts to rise about 4 inches to the platform as Farino whispers, “Incredible.”

Eric takes out his phone and says, “I have to snap a picture of this train.”

Farino says, “That’s fine, just make it quick.”

“I saw the cell tower already and I know you will be all set.” I whisper.

Eric turns sideways to focus on the length of the whole train and snaps 2 pictures.

Once Eric looks at the pictures he makes sure they came out. He says, “This is just amazing.”

Farino says, “Let’s start walking toward the back of the train now.”

“Okay”, I whisper.”

We start walking by the passengers boarding as they don’t even notice us going around them.

Once we are at the end of the train Eric decides to enter first. I, then, after him as Farino whispers, “Find seats without nosey passengers around us.”

Farino enters as he pushes me up before him.

As I look around Eric says, “Look over here there is a booth section for four. “

We walk over and take the seats as Farino says, “It sure feels good to finally sit down.”

Farino sits across from us. And of course, he is pointing his lovely handgun towards us without anyone around. All of a sudden the doors begin to close and you can feel the train rise higher than the platform we were on.

Eric’s eyes look excited as he says, “This is so unreal. I never expected anything like this.”

I happened to notice Farino’s right eye shed a tiny tear. He wipes it quickly with his left hand. He whispers, “This is the life I can get used to.”

I mumble, “Not for criminals.”

Farino gives me a surprise look and says, “ What was that young lady?”

“Oh nothing.” I answer back.

A little boy suddenly runs up to us and looks at Farino. He says, “Hi mista. What’s that you're holding under the white cloth?”

I quietly laugh as Eric gives me an elbow.

Farino says, “That’s my water bottle.”

The little boy says, “It doesn’t look like a water bottle.”

You then hear a woman shout, “Peter come back to your seat please!”

The little boy says, “See Ya.”

All three of us say,”See Ya Peter.” He runs back to his seat as he waves bye.

As the train leaves the platform it begins to pick up speed. Eric says, “It sure is unbelievable hovering above ground without train tracks.”

“I know I love it!” I shout.

The train is heading upon the mint green grass and you can see the cell phone tower from a distance as I say, “Eric, look out the window because we will be approaching the city’s cell tower.”

Farino moves his eyes to look and he says, “Don’t worry I still have the handgun pointing straight at you two.”

“Just make sure it doesn’t go off accidentally.” I whisper.

“Don’t push me to use it young lady.” Farino whispers.

We are about to pass the cell tower and I decided to ask Farino a question that was on my mind.

“Do you think your wife and daughter are willing to come back with you to New York City?” I ask.

“I have a plan. I want to talk to my wife first as I was thinking of starting a business of my own here.”

“I wonder what kind of business your plan is?” Eric says.

“Anyway we are only about 10 minutes away from the train stop. Once the train slowly stops, you have to wait till it begins to descend to the platform before we leave our seats.” I whisper.

“Got it!” Eric shouts.

Farino grabs the handkerchief and wipes his forehead. Once done, he quickly puts it over the handgun before anyone sees him.

I look over at Farino and say, “You seem to be a little nervous.”

“I haven’t seen my family. Just hope to talk to them both.”

Eric is enjoying the view out the window as I close my eyes to relax for the rest of the ride.

Minutes pass as you hear the conductor announce, “Approaching Auto Stop.” I open my eyes. The train is slowly curving towards the platform and then stops as it begins to descend. The doors open and we wait till the employees and customers get off the train first.

Farino says, “Okay let’s make our move off the train. I will be right behind as usual.”

Walking off the platform Eric says, “I hope he doesn’t bring any trouble here.”

“I hope not!” I shout.

We walk to the auto parking lot and there are shiny new cars everywhere. Farino seems to be eyeing every person, hoping to see if he sees his wife and daughter.

Four customers are outside checking out the inventory. There is one lady who has a difficult time walking as the employee unlocks the car door. He tells the lady to hold on while he pushes a button to activate the driver side chair. The chair slowly pushes outward and the lady gets onto the seat. The employee pushes the button again and the chair slowly returns to the driver side position.

Eric and I shout, “ F Unbelievable!”

I say to Eric, “I see his wife. She is by herself looking at a tan sedan.”

Farino heard me. He says, “You got that right.”

He shouts, “Giada!”

He shouts again, “Gia!”

Giada looks around and sees Farino as she seems to panic and drops her handbag.

Farino says, “You two start inching your way towards my wife.”

We walk closer as his wife is starting to shed a tear in her left eye. Farino says, “Gia I came to talk.”

Gia moves away from the sedan as Eric takes a step closer to pick up her handbag. He places it in her hand. She says, “Thank you young man.”

Gia wipes her eye quickly with her finger and says, “How did you find out about this place?”

Farino says, “I overheard Pina whispering one night in her bedroom. She wanted you to believe that a magical city existed. Then, one night when I got home, you two were not around and your closets were empty along with that music box she whispered about.”

Gia says, “Well it looks like you haven’t changed your criminal ways, since you are still carrying a handgun pointing at two innocent people.”

Farino takes a sip out of his water bottle and then says, “You know how hard it was for me after I lost my job. I had a bad year after that and I decided it was doing business another way.”

Eric and I listen as we know not to interfere between them.

My feet hurt a little after walking so much today. I speak up and say, “Where is Tira and your daughter?”

Gia turns to me and says, “They are both taking a spin around in Pina’s new car, approaching us in minutes.”

All of a sudden, a teal sedan with a spoiler can be seen turning into the parking lot and moving slowly into a parking space. Gia looks at Farino and says, “That is your daughter and the lady that formed this city with her husband. He is back at Crystal City.”

We see Tira and Pina getting out of the sedan and I decide to wave my hand to get Tira’s attention to come over.

They both start to walk and as they get closer Pina shouts, “What the hell!”

Gia says, “Don’t get angry. Your dad overheard you talking to me about this place.”

Pina says, “I’m sorry ma. I bet he went to an auction.”

Farino says, “I did. Long story on how I finally made it here.”

Farino looks at me and says, “You go move next to that lady and also you young man.”

Farino removes the handkerchief and places it in his pocket. Tira notices the handgun and says, “In this city we have rules. No weapons or criminals.”

My heart is beating so fast and I start to think. I just had to say something about his secret hideout to his wife and daughter right now.

I look at both Gia and Pina and shout, “He has a secret hideout in the backyard. There is a grass covered door. You lift it up and walk down stairs to find weapons and stolen paintings!”

Farino had a surprised look on his face and said, “That was you that day when my bodyguard said he saw a nosey person pass by and park. Then, when we came out you were gone.”

My heart is starting to relax as I say, “Yup. Long story on how I found it.”

Gia and Pina look shocked as Gia says, “Honestly in our backyard.”

Tira says,”Now please put that weapon away before someone gets hurt.”

Farino notices Tira’s stomach has a baby bump and says, “I see you're expecting.”

Tira says, “Yes I am.”

Farino points the handgun at Tira’s stomach and says, “I don’t want to do any harm, but if you do anything to confuse or distract me, I will end the baby’s life.”

I look at Tira and wonder if maybe she can do her magic.

Tira looks at the handgun and suddenly Farino feels something strange as he looks down. All of us notice the handgun slowly becoming invisible and vanishing.

Farino is shakened and I turn to Tira and say, “What you just did was awesome.”

Tira says, “That wasn’t me.”

Tira starts to laugh and she makes me laugh louder as we both shout, “The Baby!”

Tira walks over to Farino and says, “Like I told you no weapons.”

Eric holds my hand as Gia and Pina walk over to Farino. Gia says, “I will not go back to New York.”

Pina grabs her dads hand and says, “I won’t either.”

Tira gives Farino an ultimatum and says, “If you want to come back and stay, then change your ways. Go back to New York and I will have my husband help you to clear your criminal life without anyone knowing. Then you enter Crystal City to start a better life here with your family.” “Deal.”

Farino shakes his head to mean “yes”.

Tira looks at Gia and Pina and they say, “Deal.”

I look at Eric and whisper, “Well what about you bringing your business here?”

Eric is still holding my hand as he twirls me to face him. He gives me a kiss smack on my lips and after minutes he says, “Does that answer your question?”